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ADVENTURE

MAY 1947

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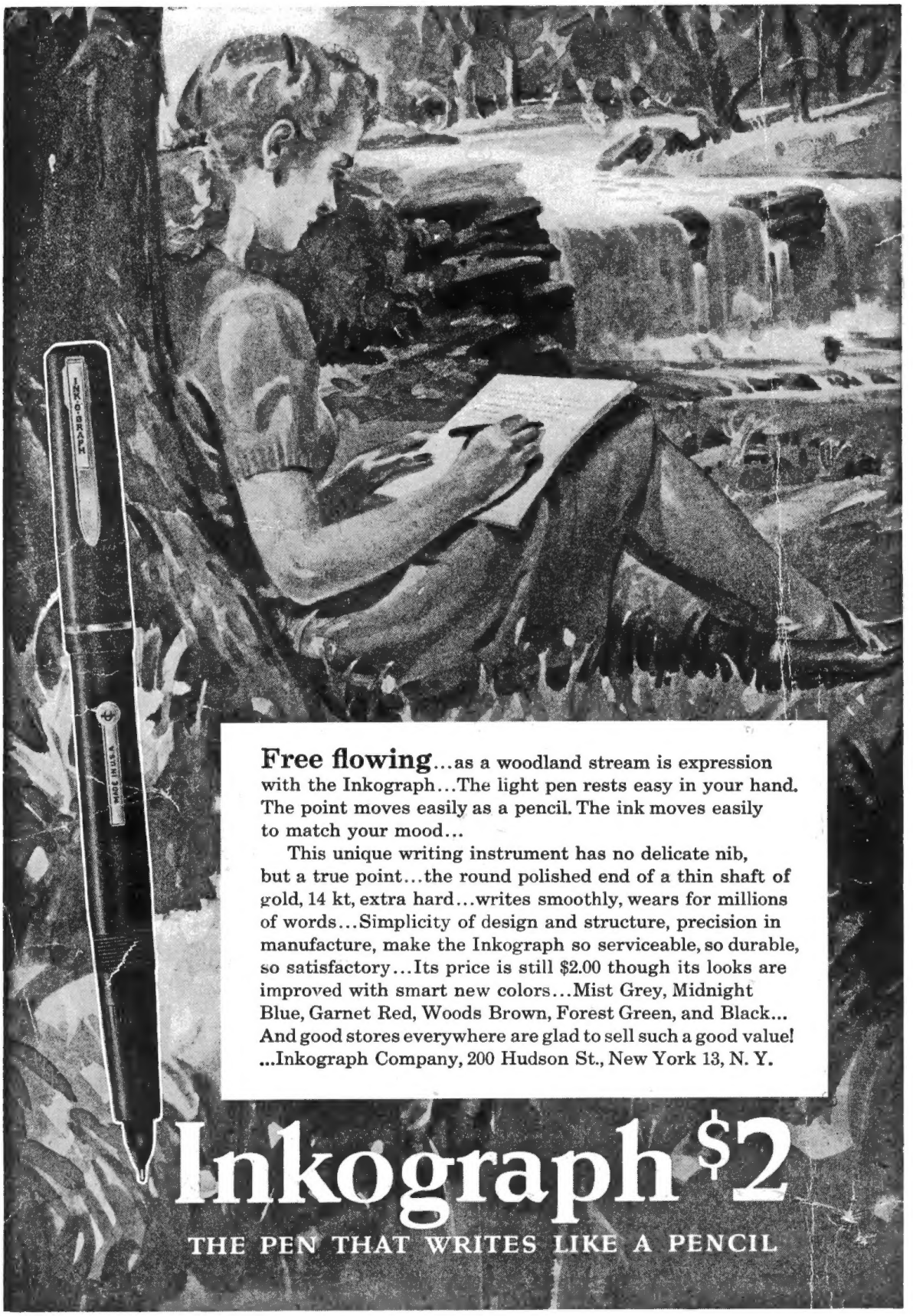

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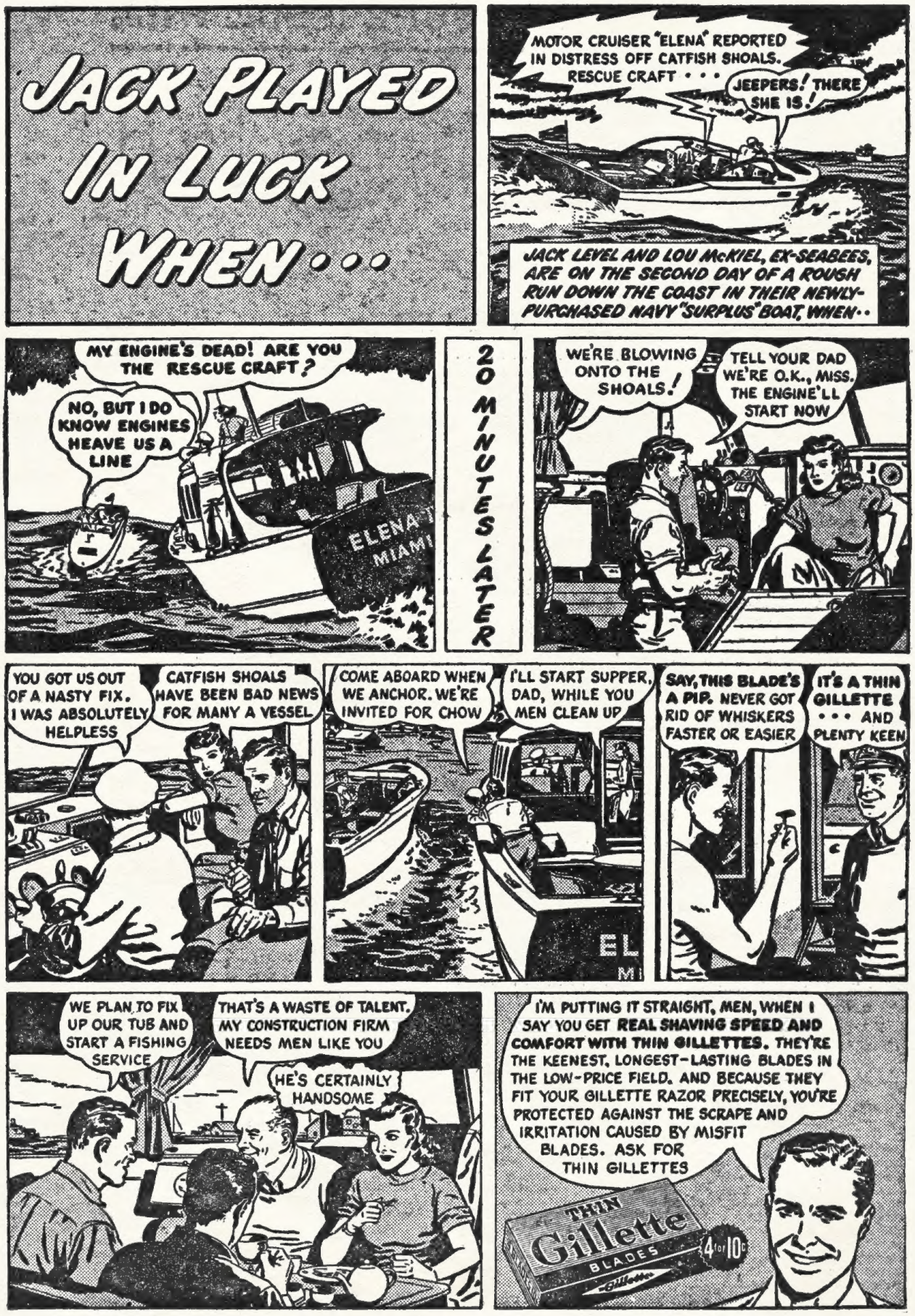
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JACK LEVEL AND LOU McKIEL, EX-SEABEES, ARE ON THE SECOND DAY OF A ROUGH RUN DOWN THE COAST IN THEIR NEWLY-PURCHASED NAVY "SURPLUS" BOAT, WHEN..
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NO, BUT I DO KNOW ENGINES HEAVE US A LINE
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MIAMI
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WE'RE BLOWING ONTO THE SHOALS!
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YOU GOT US OUT OF A NASTY FIX. I WAS ABSOLUTELY HELPLESS
CATFISH SHOALS HAVE BEEN BAD NEWS FOR MANY A VESSEL
COME ABOARD WHEN WE ANCHOR. WE'RE INVITED FOR CHOW
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SAY, THIS BLADE'S A PIP. NEVER GOT RID OF WHISKERS FASTER OR EASIER
IT'S A THIN GILLETTE ... AND PLENTY KEEN
WE PLAN TO FIX UP OUR TUB AND START A FISHING SERVICE
THAT'S A WASTE OF TALENT. MY CONSTRUCTION FIRM NEEDS MEN LIKE YOU
HE'S CERTAINLY HANDSOME
I'M PUTTING IT STRAIGHT, MEN, WHEN I SAY YOU GET REAL SHAVING SPEED AND COMFORT WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. AND BECAUSE THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY, YOU'RE PROTECTED AGAINST THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
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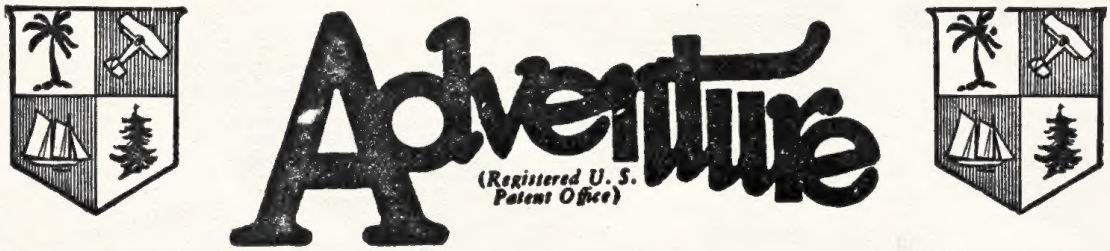

Vol. 117, No. 1 for **May, 1947** **Best of New Stories**

NOVELETTES

Xipe the Skinless..... **GORDON MacCREAGH** **12**

When I extricated Professor Alvin G. Braden from the fracas in which he'd involved himself at Las Tres Cruces, that *cantina muchacharia* in Mex City, I might have known I'd get a load of trouble for my pains. . . . Braden had a lot of moth-eaten sheets of maguey paper which revealed (he said) where there was a cache of fabulous treasure! "Brother," I told him, "fourteen million people in Mexico have been digging for Aztec loot ever since Cortez. They've got the land sieved three feet deep." Nevertheless, I found myself, a few days later, shepherding this wacky ghoul from Harvard through the jungles of the Totonacs—where the victims of the great god Xipe were flayed alive!

—And to Hell With the Pilots..... **ANDREW A. CAFFREY** **76**

Mr. John A. Googan, Super of the Pacific Division back there in Air Mail's diaper days, was a modest man. He ranked himself third in the scheme of things—after God and the angels. And he wasn't too damned certain about the angels. After all, they rated as flying personnel and John A. didn't like guys who flew. "But the mail," thundered Googan, "must go through!" Why, didn't he even refuse to fly himself—especially in bad weather—just to leave more space for the precious stuff? Still—Slim Collison wanted to fly, and God knows the bulbous, cigar-chewing Super gave him plenty of chance for that. Take that Cheyenne to Salt Lake hop, with little Mr. Pool jammed into the D.H.-4 as supercargo. . . .

SHORT STORIES

Full Throttle..... **COLEMAN MEYER** **50**

The kid was one hell of a race-driver, that's for sure. Smooth as silk with a hot iron, and with my wrenched shoulder I needed him bad to herd my boiler in the two-hundred miler at Oakland. There was something screwy about him, all the same—a regular Silent Sam. Well, it was a driver I wanted, not a companion—so what the hell.

Salt Water Daffy..... **ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN** **60**

Some men collect postage stamps, some match covers, some baggage stickers, horseshoe nails or blondes. Captain Wattles of the *Hyacinth* went in for puzzles: trick Chinese boxes, contraptions of wire, fantastic mazes of wooden links and

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balls, and sundry others that defied description. Given time, he declared—and patience—there was no puzzle he couldn't fathom. And by the Holy Harry, this one, on which the insufferable Captain Mosely had bet him a hundred dollars, would not be the first!

The Old Man Finally Died..... HAROLD R. STOAKES 68

Josiah Bolivar, taking his passel of beaver pelts down the Missouri year after year, had come to enjoy his feud with Chief Sittin' Goose more than he cared to admit. They'd been tryin' to kill one another off ever since Josiah had refused the hand of the chief's favorite daughter. But when the old man and Sittin' Goose finally come to settle their differences in that fight on Devil's Island, and Josiah buried his knife in the Injun—well, nothin' seemed right no more. And when your rum don't taste right, what good is livin'?

Charley Hoe Handle and the Spirit Wolf..... JIM KJELGAARD 100

Word had come down to Warden Horse Jenkins that he was to catch that Mardsden wolf—the last of the great gray timber wolves in Stick County—and orders is orders. So Horse swallowed his pride and went to see his old enemy, that lowdown swamp Injun, Charley Hoe Handle. Nobody, Horse knew, was going to trap that beast without Charley's help. Two days (and one wolf) later, Horse decided nobody was going to catch that wolf *with* Charley's help either. In fact, just maybe there was some connection.

THE SERIAL

Salmon Sweepstakes (2nd of 3 parts).....ROBERT E. PINKERTON 106

Ash Moulton had beaten Don Cameron at every turn—stolen his trap-site at Chickwan Cove, beaten him up on the main drag of Ketchikan, bankrupted his canning venture at Tamgas, and even courted his estranged wife while Don was away fighting a war. All in all, Don wasn't doing too well with his vow to ruin Ash and run him out of Alaska forever. But, with the help of Marty Boyle, the little horse-player who couldn't resist the chance to bet on a new kind of race, Don wasn't quite ready to call it quits!

FACT STORIES

Javelina Jamboree.....BYRON W. DALRYMPLE 94

I'd had a bow and arrow when I was a kid—before I was old enough for a gun—and a pet pig who loved my mother's cookies. So when the guide suggested a *javelina* hunt with bows for weapons, it sounded pretty tame to me—those little tuskers don't weigh over fifty pounds. I was all set for a tea party—but not for what actually followed. I learned a bit about wild pigs—and archery, too—and how to commit suicide in a hurry.

Battle of the Rangers.....JAMES T. DOTY 104

The famed Texas Rangers have figured in many a battle since they first brought law and order to a raw borderland—and acquired a reputation unique in the annals of law enforcement. But there's another battle of the Rangers that never ends—the controversy as to just where and when the force originated. And there aren't two sides to the argument but four. Here are the facts—want to join the brawl?

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire..... Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6
Ask Adventure..... Information you can't get elsewhere 137
Ask Adventure Experts.....The men who furnish it 139
Lost Trails.....Where old paths cross 142
The Trail Ahead..... News of next month's issue 141

Cover painted for Adventure by Rafael DeSoto
Kenneth S. White, Editor

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

AND *Artists* too, as we've hastened to add on various occasions. For the men who paint our covers and draw the black-and-whites which illustrate our stories and articles each month are equally welcome at this *Camp-Fire* and more often than not have as interesting footnotes to contribute to their work as the writers whose yarns they embellish. For instance—

Rafael DeSoto—whose 20th Century argonaut, combing a dry-wash in the Superstitions for precious metal with a strictly GI mine-detector on our cover this issue—has as fine a consciousness of *Adventure's* traditional accuracy and authenticity as any writer who ever sold us a yarn. When we cooked up the idea for the cover and set him off on the trail of suitable models (assinine as well as human) we thought that what would be a striking and effective cover was in the bag and we could turn to other matters.

Not so and far from it!

A week later Rafe reported that while burro and burro-drover were under control we were all wet in the basic idea for the picture. After gathering data from official Army sources—photographs, descriptive matter, technical handbooks and so on—he had learned that mine-detectors worked only on certain metals and that gold, silver and other precious ores such as might lure a recently discharged soldier to a desert prospecting venture wouldn't register at all in the ear-phone of the detection instrument. He explained further that because of this very fact the Germans had taken to coating their land-mine booby traps with a thin veneer of precious metal, thus circumventing our troops on their march across Europe.

We thought we were really stymied for a minute there until an Engineering Corps major dropped in to say hello and we explained our problem and expressed our disappointment at the prospect of having to junk what we'd thought was a swell cover-idea.

"Don't be down-hearted and go right

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 6)

ahead," the major told us, wiping the clouds away with a couple of succinct sentences. "It's perfectly true that our mine-detectors were ineffectual for a brief time when the Nazis coated their mines with non-conductive precious metal—but we soon got around that. It didn't take American inventors long to develop a detector that'd work on anything the Germans buried and toward the end of the war they gave up veneering their mines with gold and silver. We could spot it as easily as we could steel—and anyway it cost too much. They even tried wooden mines but we found a way to get around that, too."

So there we were—O.K. to go ahead—and there's DeSoto's GI on the cover, vacuum-sweeping the desert with one of the *new, latest-model* war-surplus mine-detectors that'll indicate the presence of any kind of metal you could ask for. We hope he finds another Comstock Lode—but quick—and can settle down to enjoy it and never have to go to war again!

ONLY a couple of additions to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this issue. Harold R. Stoakes, who gives us "The Old Man Finally Died" on page 68, says—

I'm a native of South Dakota and have been interested for some time in the history and development of the Dakotas from the earliest frontier days onward to present times. The coming of Ashley and Henry into fur territory during the early days introduced a colorful chapter which has been told historically and romanticized, and served as the basis of much good fiction. Ashley and Henry might be called the Henry Fords of the early fur traffic, bringing new and revolutionary methods for harvesting the pelts.

Reading of their exploits, and of the exploits of such men as Jedediah Smith and Hugh Glass who accompanied them, I frequently wondered what the reaction to the newcomers was on the part of the old-timers in the mountains and on the plains—men such as Josiah Bolivar.

I felt that I had found a small clue in the Leavenworth expedition which went up the river to chastise the Rees after an Ashley-Henry party had encountered difficulties with the Indians. There are many different versions as to why Leavenworth brought troops up the river and then, after what could hardly be called a skirmish, returned down river again. There were accusations and cross-accusations, and a person reading today can pick his own version of the story and finger the guilt where he chooses. I prefer to believe—along with the "Old Man"—that somewhere along the trip Leavenworth learned that a man in fur-bearing country had to get along with things and people as he found them.

I wanted to portray something of this attitude of live-and-let-live on the part of the old-timers as compared with the methods of the newcomers. The rest was pretty much formula. I had in my notebook a notation on a man—a present day South Dakota farmer—who has been dying with every other breath for the past twenty years or so, and decided to transplant him. My farmer friend's resistance is to rural electrification, which he won't permit extended over his land because he's "going to die most any day" and doesn't want to mess up the place for his children.

As to myself, I've been a full-time fiction writer for a little over a year, and before that a part-timer. I've been pretty much associated with writing in some form all my life. Started out while a kid in school by apprenticing on a weekly newspaper; learned linotyping, wrote news, made up the paper, learned how to sweep a floor. Went on to a couple of years of college; edited weekly newspapers here and there; worked the metropolitan newspaper and printing fields as a linotype operator; graduated into the trade magazine field as an editor and stayed put for a few years. But found that the latter, although writing, wasn't fiction—and took too much of my time and energy. Which about brings us up to date.

AND James T. Doty, whose informative little article on the Texas Rangers appears on page 104, writes (from the Lone Star State, naturally) to introduce himself—

I was born in 1912, in Bridgeport, Illinois, a small-scale oil field boomtown, and haven't lived out of sight of a derrick since. My father had an itchy foot which took him and his family to oil strikes in Kansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. As a result my education was a bit strained. I attended thirteen grade schools and four high schools, distributed throughout all said states, except New Mexico. I have been in Texas since 1926, except for six years in the Army.

In 1938 I wrangled a B.A. in Journalism from Texas Tech, but decided I couldn't live on a reporter's salary, and went to work in the oilfields of Southwest Texas as a roustabout. I worked at that for two years, and then enlisted in the Army in the summer of 1940. Don't ask me why.

My Army career was singularly uneventful. I started out in the Medical Corps, but the Air Forces were getting all the publicity, so I took a bust from staff sergeant to private and transferred. After about nine months service with the fly boys I went to the Signal Corps OCS at Ft. Monmouth, N. J. I spent the rest of the war impersonating an officer. Served two years as Radio Officer, Field, with the 53rd Signal Battalion, in Italy. Incidentally, the 53rd was undoubtedly the best tactical Signal Battalion in World War II.

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 8)

I married a New Jersey girl, and am making a good Texan out of her, and of our son, Stephen Robert, now about three months old. Since my separation from the service a year ago, I have been trying free-lancing—and I do mean trying.

My hobby is Texas history—as anyone can discover by talking to me for as long as one minute.

As for "Battle of the Rangers," I had, long ago, decided I was against some of the drivel that has been written concerning the Rangers, under the guise of fiction, and decided to find out for myself what makes them tick. Incidentally, the Rangers are now but feeble shadows of their former selves. The day of their glory, is, I'm afraid, long past. There are, I understand, about thirty-odd men, including officers, now on the force. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

We are indebted to Mr. Homer Garrison, Jr., Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, for two fine photographs of Ranger badges, black-and-white artist's reproductions of which accompany the article. In sending the photos Mr. Garrison wrote—

Picture No. 2 is the *type* of badge that was officially used prior to 1935. In 1935 the badge shown in picture No. 1 was adopted and has been in use ever since. Before 1935 many different types of badges existed due to the fact that the badge at that time was more or less semi-official and many individual Rangers had badges made to suit themselves.

ANDREW A. CAFFREY, whose novelette of the early air-mail days, "—And to Hell with the Pilots!" appears on page 76, appends the following footnote to lend authenticity and verisimilitude to his yarn—

In *Camp-Fire* of the March *Adventure*, by way of introducing the men and ships of "By the Seat of Their Pants," I mention having stood on the air-mail field at Rock Springs, Wyo., talking with the men who flew it out of that mountain-division control, east to old Cheyenne and west to the Lake. In particular, on that cold day back in the early spring of 1923, my flying companion (Army Air Service) and I talked with one Air-Mail Pilot H. A. (Hal or "Slim") Collison. At the time, Slim Collison was senior pilot on the Cheyenne-Rock Springs hop. Now, in this story, "—And to Hell With the Pilots!", I use Slim Collison, and use him by name. I do this because I believe such men as Collison belong to an actual chunk of American history. At least, American air history; and it was a tough chunk. Such men have a right to go down by name, in such a history, as they went down with their ships in the building of air mail and commercial flying. Slim Collison eventually did go down, ending it there where he loved—on the hop west out of Cheyenne. He hit that tough Laramie Range and died. But that was long after the days of DeHavilland-flown air mail.

Riding in that Army Air Service DeHavilland on that cold, stormy day, my companion and I flew almost wing-to-wing with Slim Collison—except that we didn't fly it quite so low. But we were there to see him fly it. When he flies it again this month for the *Camp-Fire* gang, said readers may rest assured that nothing new has been added. There is no exaggeration. When you read that the range stock stood on its front legs and kicked upward at the passing ship, you are reading the truth. As for the almost-blind contact flying, that was a pilot's only salvation. His compass was of little use, and he had no other instruments. But just as long as the Slim Collisions could see the ground—and keep the noses of those good old war-surplus DeHavillands out of that ground—they'd go on and on. And *they* did, and *he* did, and I hope you'll like this man at work.

WE WERE mightily pleased to receive the following communication the other day from Mr. Fred Hunt of Quincy, Mass.—

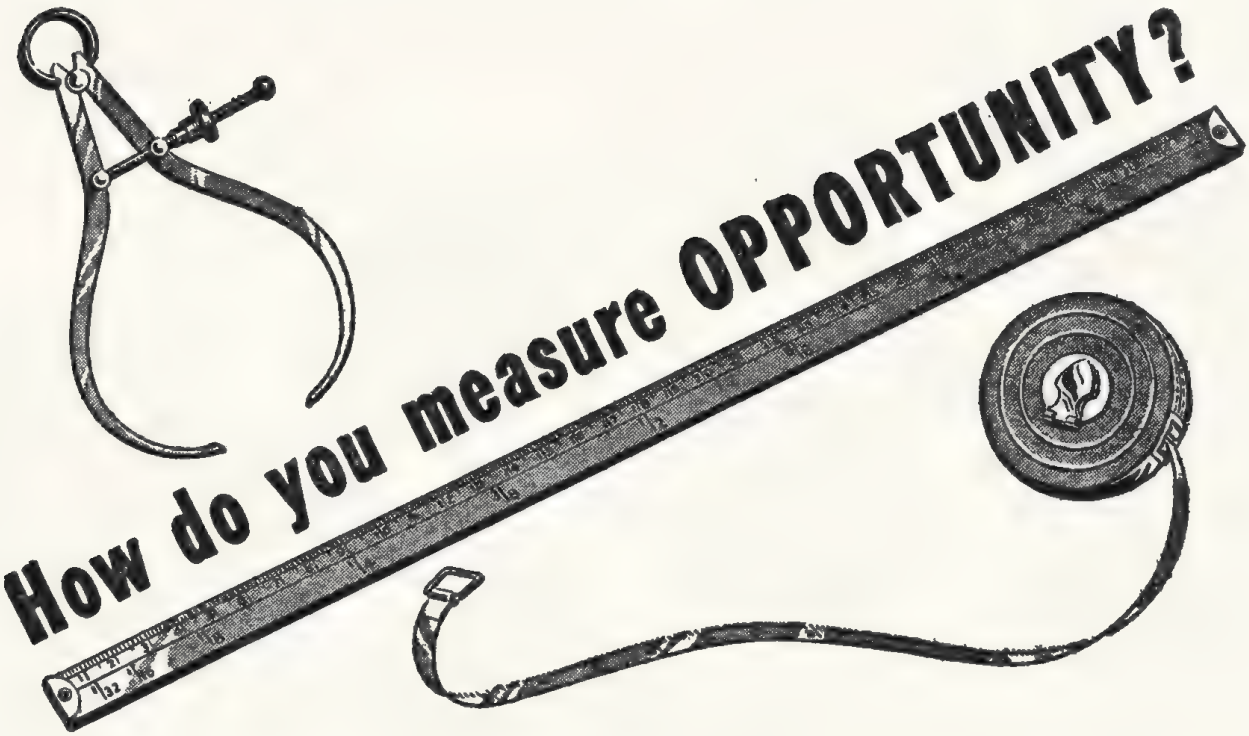
I suspect you'd be interested to know that your (Prof.) Henry G. Russell, author of the interesting series of factual articles on the Confederate Navy which run from time to time in *Adventure* made a smashing hit when he appeared as guest speaker at the meeting of the Peabody Museum (Salem, Mass.) Associates. His talk, of course, was on the *Adventure* series, and his inimitable brand of quiet humor provided the best show this group has seen for some years.

He had such men as Augustus Peabody Loring, overseer of Harvard and trustee of B.U.; Dr. Walter Muir Whitehill, librarian of the sacred Boston Athenaeum and a distinguished archeologist; Dr. Bowditch, grandson of the great Nathaniel; famous admiralty lawyers, shipping men, etc., going from chuckles to belly-laughs. So much so that they neglected, to some extent, the famous Peabody punch.

Incidentally I was particularly gratified at the way Professor Russell went over for I am a Southerner, a reader of *Adventure* for more than a quarter of a century and it was I who procured Russell as the speaker. He sure "sold" himself and our magazine.

Thanks for all them kind words, Brother Hunt, and there'll be another Russell article along in an issue or two. "The Secret Weapon of the Confederate Navy" it's called. Another chapter from the professor's forthcoming book on sea war in the South.

(Continued on page 144)



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XIPΣ

THE SKINLESS

By GORDON MacCREAGH

Suddenly we were surrounded by a dozen or so Indios, and all of them had machetes a yard long!

A HOT spot isn't just the place where I'd expect to be finding a highbrow, and in a boozy brawl, at that. Especially not in Las Tres Cruces in Mex City, that, in spite of its sanctimonious name, is a joint that peaceful oil drillers like me would just as soon not be found dead in. I had just gotten out of a uniform with a skin pretty well healed over in spots and all I was looking for was some of this peace that they told us we'd won. I went into this *cantina muchacharia* to see if Hype Agnew might be there and needing aid and comfort

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

against the enemy, like Hype often is. Hype wasn't there; but this Professor Burton was, and certainly a babe in the woods full of wolves.

You know how those things happen. There's no sane people in the world will act as dumb as we Americans when we're a stranger some place and we suddenly hear a familiar North of the Rio Grande accent.

Anybody who's been around at all has seen it happen every second day or so—what was that old song about "It's great to meet a friend from your home town"? Nor it doesn't have to be the old home town either. Just let it be an American voice, and people'll fall on each other's neck.

We're plumb provincial in that way; we've never grown up like—well, look at the British, for example, in foreign countries. Oo-oof! You don't see them going around kissing Cockney accents.

So well, this Prof had happened up with some lads and they were just the wrong gang for him; they spoke American, yes, but not his language; and they had gotten him into this girl and tequila trap and I could see that somebody was going to get knifed pretty soon.

That's another trick we have that doesn't get us loved away from home. We take a couple at the bar and that's enough for us to tell the world in a loud voice how superior we do things back home, and we don't remember that half of the rest of the world understands English, even if it's coming pretty thick on the tongue; nor we never at all remember that every country has some words that they write in blood; words South of the Border like "Spiggoty" and "Greaser."

It was none of it any of my business; but these lads were shoving their new pal around and damned if one of them wasn't even frisking him; and the rest of the clientele looking on and I could read it like print on their faces what they were thinking: "Look how the *Norteamericanos* behave."

And a bunch of British tourists, slumming, bunched at the door, thinking just about the same thing.

So I jerked this poor sap loose and told him, "Brother, you're ready to go home to your hotel—if you can remember its name."

I SHOULD have known better. I did know better, but those things get right under my collar. Because I live here. I mean, I came back out of the Army to see if I couldn't get my old job back with Petroleos.

Sure enough one of the loud gang, the biggest of 'em of course, shoved close and wanted to know where the hell I thought I was butting in. And, well, there's just two ways of handling that situation. One is to argue about it and the other is the way Army taught us—to sock the opposition with all you've got and do it fast. I don't know how come those guys didn't know about it, or whether they'd stayed out of the Army in a safe foreign country—they talked Mex well enough to have done just that last, at that; and, like I said, all I was looking for was peace—but I responded to the G.I. training. I socked the guy with all I had and did it fast.

It blacked him out, but the rest of 'em came right over the top. Why not? I was alone. At least for a while—for long enough to get a few solid ones and see the lights dance—till a couple of the bartenders wanted in and a slummer tourist said, "I say, that's a bit too thick," and he pitched in on my side; and the stripper girls screeched and some of the natives who hadn't liked the word "Spiggoty" took a hand; and the war was pretty even. And then the cops came.

Don't let anybody ever tell you we can lick the Mex police just because we're *Americanos*. I left the tough gang to find that out. I got my little Prof by the arm and out the side door to the Calle General Maximiliano Villalongin (that's a lot narrower than its name) and I staggered him along—I mean, I was doing the staggering because somebody had crowned me with a three-legged table—along to the wide *Calzada*, and there came roaring a bus. One of those red things that are always packed like a box of matches and you jump for it and hang onto other people's clothes who are hanging on themselves and they curse you and help you hang.

We hung as far as I guessed was safe out of the fracas and jumped off at the Alameda—without paying any fares, of course; sweet chance a ticket taker has to shove through the mob to the doorway.

I shook my Prof till I could get my own breath back and I told him, "What you owe me, sap, is your roll and likely your life and a new suit of clothes. Now, Mister Damfool Senior, tell me where you live and I'll put you in a taxi and tell him where to go."

Of course, I hadn't known he was any professor up till then; I'd seen him as just a little guy, looking pretty lost and getting a going over from the kind of compatriot of mine that I don't like in a foreign country. But the minute he opened his mouth I knew he was honest-to-God long-hair and Harvard, at that. He said, "I am in your debt, Sir, for extricating me from what seems to have been a hazardous contretemps." Not that he talked that way all the time when I got to know more of him; but he was on the edge of sobering up and he had to be careful about saying things just right.

To cut a lot of palaver short, he told me what I'd guessed—that he was new in Mex and, more, he was actually looking for some *Americanos* who knew their way about and he had run into this gang; or, curiously enough, they seemed to have made a point of running into him and they had been friendly as all get out and led him to what they said was a nice little place where they could eat together —The Three Crosses, migod! And they gave him something to drink that they said was almost harmless—tequila!—and then he didn't know much more. But he knew he lived at the Reforma Hotel and nothing would suit but that I must come up to his room with him and he was sure we could do some business together.

The Reforma, let me tell you, means money with a hidden cover charge for breathing its air; and, well, I hadn't gotten as far as getting my old job back yet —so I went on up with him to hear him talk business.

I might have known. His story had long gray hair on it. He was an archaeologist and he had a lot of moth-eaten sheets of Aztec maguey paper that told him where there was a cache of treasure; a fabulous treasure, he said—if he'd translated the picture right.

I told him, "Brother, fourteen million people in Mexico have been digging for Aztec treasure ever since Cortez and they've got the land hand-sieved about three feet deep. That's why they raise such good fruit."

But you can't eradicate the bug out of a good treasure hunter any more'n you can malaria. He wasn't offended, he was just superior. He knew what he knew and he went cagey about it; he wouldn't hint where the millions lay, not till we'd get there—he had all the symptoms. But his proposition was acceptable to a man who hadn't as yet got a better job. I was to shepherd him along and fix for mules and grub and all that and generally carry on the good work of being his guardian angel.

So we shook on a deal.

HIS name, he said, was Braden, Alvin G. Braden, with some degree letters after it, and that was sensible enough, even if he was going treasure hunting. He weighed around a hundred twenty and he had weak eyes—and, I found out later, guts too. I'm Diabhuid Donuil Tamms and I've always been sensible, even if my Dad was Scots and wasn't. He meant David—so the driller pals call me Dave, and sometimes D.D.T. I weigh into the hundred-eighty and there's nothing weaker about me than a driller can afford to have. only that I'm scared of getting into trouble—I've had all I need of it and I want peace.

So O.K., I asked the Prof where would he want me to have his expedition jump off and I'd go get organized, because what I've seen of treasure hunts they're always in the worst section of any country you care to name.

He said Papantla would be the jump-off; and I thought, oh-oh. Could just be that this lad had something more'n hallucinations. There's quite a piece of heavy jungle down that way and not so long ago they made a new discovery of an ancient pyramid there and I knew there were more that the scientific prowlers hadn't dug out yet. I know because I'd worked on an oil job by the Necaxa River and I'd hacked a little bit around the jungle edges with a machete and a gun. I tried Alvin G. out. I told him, "D'you know that the Indios down there are Totonacs, and they don't believe such a much of what the Padres tell 'em, preferring their old *tlenamacac* wizards, and they'd rather everybody would stay away,

and some of 'em got blue eyes—which the scientific sharps don't know how come and, come their Xipe fiestas—that's the one for whom the old-timers used to flay their prisoners before ripping their hearts out with a jagged obsidian knife—they won't let strangers come fooling around their villages."

He didn't even hear that last. His eyes popped and he grabbed me by the arm. "Blue eyes!" he yapped. "You've seen them?"

Sure I had; and their color was quite pale, almost red-cheeked; good lookers, some of the women. The prof breathed like he was having a revelation. "Evidence again," he said, "of Churchward's theory of Lemurian migration before it sank."

I didn't know what he was talking about. Then he deflated as he had steamed up. "Interesting," he said. "Astounding. But after all, not my subject. I'm alone in this."

And did that leave me flat! For a minnte I thought I'd given him a lead to his buried hoard; but those highbrows can get excited about practically anything that has no profit to it as long as it's old.

"Alone," he said. I asked him what did he mean, alone? Wasn't there at least a collegeful of grave robbers who'd studied over those same maguey fibers?

"Oh yes," he said. "Why certainly. It's only that I disagree with De-Peña's accepted translation of the glyphs."

And on the strength of that, of a quibble about what a curlicue meant, he was going treasure hunting! But a thought was beginning to itch. "Those good pals," I said, "who were frisking you. What d'you figure made them so all-fired interesting in picking exactly you up and spending their money on high-priced drinks in a *muchacharia* joint?"

He had no idea; it didn't even bother him. His reading of the curlicues was his own; he hadn't argued his theories with more than a dozen or so professors at any time, and they, of course wouldn't stoop to liquoring a colleague up and having his pockets picked. It must have been because the gang thought he might have some money about him.

I said, "Yeah? And how many students have those colleagues lectured to? No, you don't look to me like any rich playboy to draw the time and cash outlay of experienced tourist-clippers. And what's more, the little I've ever heard about archaeologists, they'd steal the Queen of Sheba's false teeth from their favorite blind kid sister and lock 'em up in a glass case so long as they were old enough to be chipped around the biting edge; and if there was any real buried treasure involved, well, that lets in one or two other people I could think of."

He said stiffly, "Mr. Tamms, I'm afraid your associations in life have left you rather suspicious of your fellow man."

Could be, I was willing to agree; because a man who's knocked around amongst the horny-handed sons of toil doesn't get so he takes them all for holy men. I decided, if I wanted a peaceful treasure hunt, I'd better go back to that creeper joint and spend a peso or two asking questions about the customers.

But I drew a clear blank. The gang was new, they swore; tourists just arrived, and most of them were in jail anyhow for some rough work during the fight.

It must have been pretty rough, I figured, for the Mex cops to go to the trouble of jailing them instead of just knocking them cold and throwing them out. But they must have been new, at that, although they talked Spanish, not to know about that side door. Nothing I could do, though. If the joint didn't know, I was sure those tough birds wouldn't tell me any secrets through the jail bars.

I went on down to Papantla to collect some porter peons; mules would never squeeze a mile through that kind of jungle. And in a couple of days I sent word to the Prof to pack his mosquito net and atabrine and come along.

CHAPTER II

FIESTA OF FLYING MEN

HE WAS there in a couple more days, and I tried him out again. I took him to an outhouse hotel where if you know about it, the bricks are loose in the side wall so you can softly pick one out and peek what the girl in the next room may be doing. Not that I had much choice about it; the village doesn't rate any Statler or Ritz. He never batted an eye. All

he said as he looked over the mess was, "What is all the armament for?"

I didn't want to ride him; I said I was just a guy who always went treasure hunting with enough moral persuasion to keep the coyotes off nights. He asked, all wide-eyed innocent, whether I expected trouble. I told him flat, no; because I didn't believe there was any hidden loot left in Mexico; but if there was I'd bet a pack of bootleg brass shells trouble would come nosing it out like *zopilote* buzzards.

He just said, indeed, and would we be ready to start tomorrow? And I said, "Sure, where to?" And you could have blown me down.

He didn't know! He said we'd have to go in and ask around.

I said, "Lordamighty, are you telling me all the plans you've got is to machete a way into those jungles and ask the local peasantry where there's a pile of their sacred gew-gaws that even the Conquistadores couldn't twist out of 'em?"

He said quite simply, yes, that was it. Nobody else knew about this cache; only his reading of the pictures made it out that there was an ancient temple back in the woods.

And on the strength of that much he was going treasure hunting! I thought, hell, a wildcat well drills on better evidence; but who was I to argue against Harvard? So we loaded up the Indio porters and I took him first to El Tajin.

That's the newest pyramid they've found and enough excited *científicos* have tramped around there so there's a path; and they're still arguing whether it was dedicated to Zotzilaha Chimalman, the bat god of darkness whose job it was to destroy everything, or to Ipalneomohuani, the sun god who gave life. The names those old Mayas thought up! It just goes to show how much the studious boys know about it all. Only thing they agreed about was that it was one of the oldest buildings in all America and that there must be more of the same somewhere back in the jungle. So that was one up for my professor.

This Tajin has four sides, each exactly facing the four compass points, and 91 altar niches in each, adding up to 364, plus 1 for the top; which proves that the builders knew a lot more about astronomy —and I couldn't forget astrology and such wizardries—than ever the Egyptian priests did. To me it made no difference; I'd climbed up to the top and there was the usual old hollow in the rock to collect the blood and a channel to drain some of it off when it got too full. They've got one in the *Museo Nacional*—a "sacrificial stone" they call it. Those old-timers didn't care to whom they sacrificed their prisoners so long as there was blood. It was a creepy thought up and down my back hairs that nobody knew exactly what the religion of these Totonacs was today nor what they had of left-overs from the way back days.

Prof Alvin G. Braden never seemed to have any squeamish ideas. He prowled all over that pyramid and wasted half a day on it and got nothing. We'd have to go on, he said. So we made about a day's crawl along what might have been a coyote trail to an old mound that must have been older even than the Tajin, for it was just a pile of rubble. And then suddenly we were surrounded by a dozen or so Indios and all of them had machetes a yard long!

Our *porteros* just grinned and I could bet they'd known all along that this was the end of the road. They grunted the sounds that are Totonac and then they told us, *"Prohibido el pasaje"*—Passage forbidden!

And then it came to me. One of those weird ceremonies of theirs was coming due. The Fiesta of the Voladores, the Flying Men, and that's another something that the *científicos* don't know the why about, but the Totonacs swarm in from their inner jungles and pull it off every year slam in front of the church and the padres have been tipped by the government to lay off or there'd be an Indian uprising.

THE PROF let out a yipe. Not because of the freely handled machetes, but because one of those ruffians had blue eyes! A way back a savage as any you'd find, and he looked doped, sort of hypnotized like—deadpan, with his eyes wide, and while he looked at you you knew he wasn't seeing you. You know what I mean, like a zombie or something. All he wore was a maguey cloth skirt and his hair was a pure crow's nest, but his hide

He looked doped, like a zombie or something.

might almost have been a well-baked Coney Island lifeguard. Of course my theory always was that some strong blooded old conquistador hadn't given a hoot about the Mann act when Cortez came storming up from Vera Cruz. But my Prof went farther back; he yipped about migration from Lemuria again and he jumped for this near-blond to peer into his eyes and turn him about and generally handle him like a museum piece.

The others set up a yammer like it was sacrilege and one of 'em stood clear and made to take a swing at the Prof that would have split him in two; but I shoved a shotgun up against his belly—I never fool with anything so uncertain as solid ball in close jungle—and the situation froze.

The Prof didn't even know about it. He was gibbering words and pointing at the rubble pile. I don't know what they were; not American, nor Spanish; they were noises like some of those twisted mouthfuls of ancient gods' names. The Indios gawped at him like he was miracles happening and their tough scowls turned to look less like fight; and then you could have rocked me again with a breath. Damned if he wasn't talking Maya!

He didn't know Spanish, this Harvard highbrow, like everybody else but Maya! What I mean, he wasn't conversing or anything like that; but he knew scraps of some of those words five thousands years old or whatever, and of course I'd heard that some Maya had come through to the Totonac talk.

The Indios gawped and some of them slid into the jungle and in a little while they were back with a man who looked like a hundred and thirty years old and wore a red mask with a jaguar's skull as a headdress, and my stomach heaved up to where I could taste it. As a driller I'd turned up enough old stones to know that that outfit represented Xipe, the god who had no skin and so he liked to have his prisoners of war flayed alive before he ate their hearts all steaming hot. I didn't know what this old *tlenemacac* was playacting, but I swung my shotgun over to let him see sense in being reasonable. But the Prof gibbered his magic words and the medicine man gibbered them back with a better pronunciation and I don't know what all the two of 'em made out of it; but presently the wizard coughed at his strong-arm boys and they edged back into the jungle like dogs, watching us all the time, their lips quivering, and the old man adopted the Prof right there. He took him by the arm and led him around a corner of the rock pile and scrabbled away some dirt and showed him a stone and the Prof went all the way batty.

Like the stone. It was carved with the figure of a man flying with skins stretched over bamboo spreaders like a bat. If the Tajin was a mere five-thousand-year baby and this was older it meant that some brainy lad had been civilized enough to think about flying long before the Wrights. The Prof wanted to pry the slab loose and he babbled about a priceless find and the Harvard museum must have it.

I told him, "Migod, man! You can't loot antiques that way. Those good old days have gone. *Antiguos* belong to the

Mex Government. But if your museum has any rating and you can pull official strings they may let you find a millionaire angel to buy it for you."

His shirt stiffened right up and he made that crack again about the kind of people I must have associated with, as though folks who worked for a living ought to know what kind of rating his college collection of potsherds had, and he capped it with, "But nobody knows we've found it."

As though that squared everything. I'd already told him what I thought about an archaeologist's conscience and here was just one more proof. Not that I thought it any sacrilege to lift an old carved rock, but I wasn't laying myself open to a Mex jail for thieving the people's antique culture.

But the wizard settled the whole thing. He just covered up his rock again and grunted at our *porteros* and they told us he said that we'd have to go back, and when this Fiesta of Flying Men was all over we might come again and perhaps he'd let us through, depending whether anybody got killed at the fiesta. I didn't know what that could have to do with it; but I knew damn well, if we did come back, that carved rock wouldn't be there. It meant something to those Totonacs.

The Prof just about cried; but I could hear those machete men rustling around behind the lianas and I took and shoved him along the way we'd come and he babbled about practically having proof now of his interpretation of the old maguey pictures and about Lemurian culture and another old unfound pyramid and what all.

What I knew about lemurs was they were a kind of nocturnal monkeys with big eyes and long fuzzy tails and they wailed in the banana tops like ghosts. But he said, "Don't be stupid. Lemuria, the Pacific continent that sank some ten thousand years ago. Muria, Muya, Maya, don't you see?"

I asked, migod, did he believe in those yarns, like Atlantis and all that? and he wouldn't commit himself; he said, oh he didn't know, but there were quite a few students of history before its beginning who argued that there were traces of some such lost civilization on both sides of the Pacific; and then he shook it from him like it was of no importance. "It is not my subject," he said again. "The important thing is that their stopping us argues there is something farther in the jungle and if it's Maya we know that the flayed god was a son of the bat god of the night and they made splendid offerings of—" and right there, as he was on the edge of spilling some information about what was his own subject that he'd brought me here for, he switched. "And from where do you think the name, lemurs, came to your monkeys anyhow?"

THE devil an' all I should know about such riddles. He went on, half talking to himself. "And if I have impressed that old priest that I'm not just an idle tourist, or a robber, or something and we can go on through—"

What did he mean, priest, I butted in. "That old crow is a sure 'nough *tlenemacac*, a medicine man hereditary pyramid warden from away back like the padres like to say there aren't any more; but you've seen him and your bits of ancient lingo have horned us into something that makes my skin creep."

He said in his professorial tone, "Really, Dave, you're positively naive. All priests of ancient times were medicine men, for the simple reason that they had the knowledge of the mysteries. It is only amongst the modern Christian people that they have lost it and don't know any more than you." And he added to that, "Or rather, let me say, even than I."

That's what an ordinary guy gets when he hob-nobs with the higher education. I had to cut him down to my size. I reminded him, "And what do you mean, you're not a robber? Heck, man, what have you come for? Even our Uncle Sam claims that treasure trove is half of it his."

He wouldn't say. I guess we weren't deep enough into the woods so he could be sure I mightn't spill the beans to some other archaeologist. Deep enough for me, though. What I wanted was a peaceful life, and though my shin was pretty crudely patched by a young Army doc who was strictly practicing, I still liked it well enough not to be begging permission from any priest of Xipe to go shoving into the tall timber where there might be another old temple with no police protection.

I told him all that and what did he think Papa Zotzilaha Chimalman and Son Xipe would think about a Christian Harvard man coming to swipe their ancient boodle and was it "splendid offerings" enough to make it worth while

He suddenly blazed with enthusiasm. "If it's what I think," he said, "it's fabulous." And then he dropped out of it. "Well, it seems that if anybody gets killed at this fiesta we won't be allowed to go anywhere."

I hoped a fair dozen of somebodies would get killed at the fiesta.

They didn't. Only one did; though the way they pulled off their stunt, I'm surprised it wasn't more. This fiesta thing, to cut a lot of talk, was a repeat act of that old idea of flying. A gang of Indios danced—and right on the front steps of the church. They were dressed up in red and green with macaw feather plumes. Four of them were the pale-skinned kind and absolute deadpan, zombies like the one back in the jungle. They were sacred too; none of the others must touch them. They shuffled around and a masked guy hopped amongst them like a referee and kept whispering at them; not our jungle mummy; this one had a brown mask and he didn't rate so high, he had no jaguar skull. Another man with a drum and a reed pipe was allowed to hop close to them. Out front they had rigged a pole, a whole hundred-foot tree. They were going to "fly" from its top.

They danced for hours—right on the front steps of the church.

The government had sent down a *cientifico* to take it all in. He wasn't an archaeologist; he didn't care what people had done five thousand years ago; he was an ethnologist, he was interested in what they did now. He was reeling off movie film by the mile. The gang danced for hours—they always do at all fiestas.

I STROLLED around the crowd a spell, and I saw something I didn't like at all. They were a pair of unmistakable *Americanos,* dressed in the worst tourist style. I think I've said I'm a man who isn't looking for any fuss, but I had to know. I went up to them and said, "Hello, punks. How did you get out of the hoosegow?"

That's exactly what they were, big town toughies. They started, like caught in the act, and the rattier of them sniped, "What the hell d'you know about any hoosegow?" and then he recognized me. "Oho! You're the smart guy who horned in on our party at the Three Crosses. Well, Buttinski, we were smart enough not to get into the cooler. As smart as you, see. And that's something it won't hurt you to remember."

I said, "I never got to college to train my memory. And what all are you doing at a li'l old native fiesta? Improving the minds you haven't got?"

I could see the other punk's fingers curl, like he'd like to have 'em round the butt of a gun, and I could see the lump under his left armpit. He covered his itch with surliness. He said, "We're tourists. And who the hell're you to come asking free American citizens what they're doing?"

I took the two of 'em by their lapels to pull 'em close and whispered it portentous. I said, "Listen—and it'll be nice for *you* to remember. I'm Shotgun Dave. Sawed-off Shotgun Davie; and I can shoot a man's teeth out at ten-foot range from behind any jungle bush." So then I slapped 'em a good one apiece over their ears to see if they were remembering and I took care to crowd too close for any monkey play with that gun. They remembered all right and I left it with them to mull over. I sure as hell did not like any of it. The same crowd that was frisking the Prof. What interest did they have in folk lore and such? And I supposed they'd be smart enough to wangle their pals out of Mex City jail presently too.

I went to tell Mr. Alvin G. Braden. He was talking to the ethnologist of the *Gobierno.* That one was lecturing, "We don't know why they do it, nor just what its significance is. We know they've done it for a long time because Bernal Diaz del Castillo reports it from as far back as the Cortez invasion."

I said, "Heck, mister, it's way older than that. Why, we've seen a—" And right there Professor Alvin G. Braden of Harvard ground his heel rasping down my ankle bone just like any common barroom horse tout. He said, "We saw a glyph in the museum that seems to indicate some such ceremony as pre-Colombian."

Yes, the *Gobierno* man knew about that, but they weren't exactly sure what it meant, and Bernal's was the first written description, and so he went on, "We know it has some sort of astronomical and religious connection, and that the risk they take signifies sacrifice. It is definitely a hang-over from some stubborn pre-Christian cult; otherwise why do they insist on flaunting it at the church door? It is quite obvious that those four bedrugged, or hypnotized, devotees who are going to fly are especially chosen initiates of the ancient cult."

My Prof asked, "Does *Banisteria caapi* grow in these parts?"

The ethno nodded. "We have not discovered any of those extraordinary *telepatina* rites here, but it could account for the apparent hypnosis."

It was all over my head, but I could get the next all right.

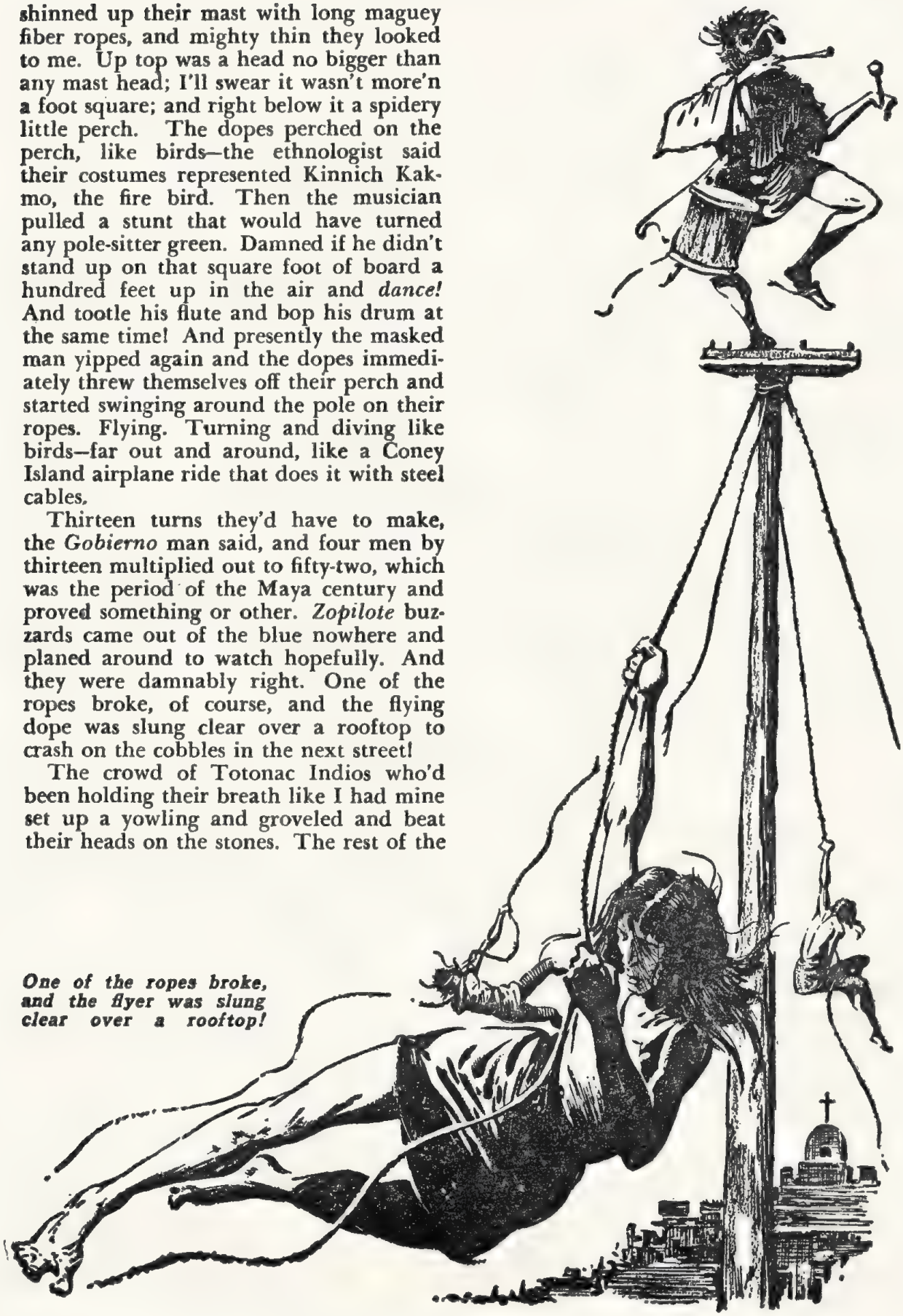
"And we know that if anything happens to them, if any disaster occurs during the ceremony, as for instance, one of them getting killed, it is a sign that their god is dissatisfied about something and it will be a bad year for them—unless they propitiate him with whatever other sacrifice he needs."

That was cheerful remembering a little later when the disaster did happen. What they did was, the man in the mask suddenly decided they'd danced long enough to call the attention of this man-eating god and he made the high sign and immediately the four dopes and the musician

shinned up their mast with long maguey fiber ropes, and mighty thin they looked to me. Up top was a head no bigger than any mast head; I'll swear it wasn't more'n a foot square; and right below it a spidery little perch. The dopes perched on the perch, like birds—the ethnologist said their costumes represented Kinnich Kakmo, the fire bird. Then the musician pulled a stunt that would have turned any pole-sitter green. Damned if he didn't stand up on that square foot of board a hundred feet up in the air and *dance!* And tootle his flute and bop his drum at the same time! And presently the masked man yipped again and the dopes immediately threw themselves off their perch and started swinging around the pole on their ropes. Flying. Turning and diving like birds—far out and around, like a Coney Island airplane ride that does it with steel cables.

Thirteen turns they'd have to make, the *Gobierno* man said, and four men by thirteen multiplied out to fifty-two, which was the period of the Maya century and proved something or other. *Zopilote* buzzards came out of the blue nowhere and planed around to watch hopefully. And they were damnably right. One of the ropes broke, of course, and the flying dope was slung clear over a rooftop to crash on the cobbles in the next street!

The crowd of Totonac Indios who'd been holding their breath like I had mine set up a yowling and groveled and beat their heads on the stones. The rest of the



One of the ropes broke, and the flyer was slung clear over a rooftop!

village up and rushed around the block to gawp at the accident just as fast as any *Americano* crowd. The musician way up there broke his drum and smashed his pipe and threw them down; and as the pieces hit ground all the Totonacs quit their wailing and froze to the floor and the sun boiled down on a sudden graveyard silence. Nothing moved—only from up above came the thin swish of the other three flyers sailing through the air.

The Prof spoke, tight in the throat but determined as a hardrock drill. He said, "That means the Xipe wizard won't let us through at the Tajin. We'll have to find another way around."

I said, "My God! Still?"

The *Gobierno* ethnologist said, "Why around to where?"

The Prof said nothing.

I said, "Let's get outa here."

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND MASK OF XIPE

WE GOT out. There was nothing to stop us, nobody in the streets; Men, women and kids were all milling around the dead initiate of whatever it was who proved that their god was mad at them and would be wanting more sacrifice.

Back in the sweaty old hotel room I tried to reason with the Prof. But all he would say, as stiff as a drill rod, was, "You are a free agent, Mr. Tamms. If you are afraid to go through with it I shall have to find somebody else."

I told him, "Yeah, and I know exactly where you can find two hard little potatoes who I'll bet are just as interested as you are to go wherever you are going treasure hunting."

That shook him for just a moment and he had to know what I meant. I told him about the two punks, and the way I sized them up they were as smart as they said, and they knew their way around enough to buy the rest of their gang out of the clink before too long—and then he'd have a real escort to fight through a whole lot of opposition.

He pursed up his lips—I'd never seen before how tight he could make them. He mulled it over, then he stuck by his guns. "I can't believe that any of my colleagues would try to follow me—even if they knew. But if somebody else may have got some sort of an inkling and hired, as you might say, claim jumpers, it just means that I shall have to hurry before they get free. I had hoped I could say, *we* shall have to hurry, but—" He shrugged disappointment. "Somehow I had judged you differently, Dave."

As clever as an old hand gang boss when the jinx hits the boring gear. I wanted none of it. I wanted peace. But when he put it that way—

I damned him and all I could say was, "Well, I haven't ever quit on a contract yet and I never thought a Harvard professor could be that crazy. But since you're so sure I'm sillier than you, O.K., we'll get up and git *now* and we'll see if we can cut in back of Tajin by the Necaxa River."

He grinned like he'd won a school debate and said, "Good boy, Dave." and he had to shake hands on it, like a new deal. We told it around that we'd seen the show we came to see and we were going home. We made a big show of hiring an old broken-down car and piled in our gear and we even shook hands with the hotel proprietor—whom we ought better to have killed—and we roared and bucketed off on the home trail.

And at the Necaxa the Prof paid the driver to go on to Mexico City for a vacation and stay drunk for a month and we bought a dugout canoe, as big as a matchbox and about as fragile, from a chicle hunter and went on. "And that," I said, "ought to shake the bloodhounds off of our trail."

I didn't know where to go any more'n he did; only, since the Xipe wizard had stopped us back of Tajin, it was good guessing that the direction would be that way. It took trigonometry to figure out how far to follow the Necaxa windings and then where to head by compass. Even the Prof didn't know any of that; he was an archaeologist, he growled, not a dry and dusty mathematician. I didn't know which of the two was dustier. So we quit our canoe when it quit us; when our skin was crinkled white from sitting hip deep in water and bailing took so much time we made no progress. We hauled out at a village; what I mean, four *chiclero* huts on the bank. Chicle hunters don't

live long, the kind of jungle they have to live in; so we could strike a bargain with four halfdead ones to carry our gear for us, for enough money so they could retire; nearly ten bucks apiece, and they insisted they'd have to have it in advance.

I asked the Prof, "D'you know what that means?"

He didn't. So I told him. "Means they think it's a fair bet we won't be coming back."

It was my last feeble chance to call it all off, but I couldn't discourage him. He said, "That's because the poor devils don't know about all the new medicines the Army developed for jungle work."

That man could shut his eyes to what he didn't want to know just as tight as any other schoolteacher. Where to head in was anybody's guess. The *chicleros* didn't know where any pyramids grew that nobody had yet found; but they had their trails that they'd hacked hither and yon, hunting for their trees; and a *chiclero* trail let me tell you if you don't know it, is no avenue that you stroll through standing up; you do it on your hands and knees and your belly. You make half a dozen kilometers a day and by the end of the first one you know why they are half dead.

THE rainy season was in its full middle, meaning that forenoons the sun made a Turkish steam room below the tree tops that you could never see—and afternoons, when those thick tropic drops pelted down, you swam. Even the monkeys quit that country in the rainy season on account of the mosquitoes that shoved 'em off their trees and ate 'em raw in the underbrush. Yes, we had head nets and cotton gloves and all the rest of the comforts that the Army thought it discovered for jungle work—though why the brass boys in Washington hadn't just asked some old oil explorer and saved a year's time, I don't know; and why the hell anybody would choose that country to build temples in was something else I didn't know.

The Prof said, muffled through the million different bugs that blanketed his head net, "There is considerable ground for the theory that climatic changes were the reason for the otherwise unaccountable disappearance of those old civilizations." And he could find his note of good cheer, "Which is all to our advantage, since that is why nobody has explored these jungles."

"Because they don't know how much treasure is buried in 'em, I suppose," I said. "Only you know, and that's mighty thin encouragement to me."

And he said, "Yes, I'm almost sure now that I know." Which was still a damn sight less encouragement than folks have who go treasure hunting on a phony map drawn on a pirate's shirt tail who never had any shirt.

Nights we slept in hammocks, of course, slung high so mud fish and whatnot wouldn't nibble at us; what I mean is, we lay in hammocks and when we were so beaten dog-tired from crawling in the wet that we wondered how *chicleros* ever lived a year we sometimes half slept. So that's how I heard it. I hissed at the Prof and he was full awake in a second and I gave him the good news. I said: "There's a whole lot of something shuffling about ahead of this 'gator run we've been following, and it isn't animals."

He didn't have to guess what I meant. "So you think we're headed off again?"

"Damn tootin'." And I didn't care if he heard me chuckle. "And I can find my way back to our luxury canoe blindfolded and one foot tied to a stump. But how the devil an' all they located us here beats me. I know nobody followed us out of Papantla and even bloodhounds couldn't have trailed us downriver."

"I wonder," he said. "I wonder if it could be anything so extraordinary interesting as the *telepatina*."

And I said, "Yeah, I wonder. You talked about it with the other educated guy and I'm still wondering."

So he lectured. "It's an infernal nuisance, though a first-hand investigation of it would almost be worth while the time we lose finding another way through." You couldn't down that guy's stick-to-itiveness after his loot; I wondered what Army outfit he'd served with. "You remember," he said, "I asked the ethnologist whether *Banisteria caapi* was found in these parts Well, it is a plant with some very curious drug properties. It was first discovered in Brazil by an explorer by the name of MacCreagh, who reported some hypnotic and anaesthetic properties. Later Dr. Rafael Bayon investigated it in Colombia and wrote a very learned monograph about it in which he insisted that he had witnessed more than one instance of telepathy under its influence, even to the extent of their *curacas*, or medicine men, showing evidence of receiving accurate news of distant events in visions."

I said, "And Harvard can swallow that?"

It always got under his collar when I said anything about Harvard. He said, "There is nothing so humorous about it as the ignorant laity might think. A whole library of serious literature attests similar evidence found among primitive peoples, especially among African witch doctors. Hitherto, it has not been reported here. An investigation at first-hand will be most valuable."

Well, maybe he was right. Maybe these uneducated primitive peoples got it like Dunninger—or who's the guy who does it on the radio? Or maybe it was just that; something as simple as little radio sets built into their brains. But we were both good and gruesomely wrong. I mean, about us being headed off.

Come morning there was a crowd of Indios all around us, about fifty of 'em, all with those yard-long machetes—and they weren't politely turning us back, they were taking us along with them!

Oh yes, we had our guns; shotguns, like I said. But it's only in movies that two intrepid white men can fight their way through fifty Indians in close jungle that grows up around your ears. We hadn't seen a movie in months; so we didn't have any wrong ideas about how many foreigners two good Americans could lick. The Indios gabbled at our *chicleros* and those hard-working boys didn't even ask for a tip. They said what must have amounted to "Thank you, kind sirs," and they skittered back into their jungle trails without a regretful look. A voice of authority coughed some twisty-jawed Totonac out of the bush scenery; some of the Indios hoisted our gear and some more of them told us in machete language that didn't have to be translated, to get going. We went peaceable.

THEY were Totonacs, of course —though all the Totonacs I'd seen up till then were city slickers who came in to make fiesta dressed in white dungarees. But you could tell by their Mayan beaks and their good looks if not by their clothes; for all the clothes this gang wore was breech clouts and their pale hides looked all the paler for a million little scars left by thorns as they shoved through the cat-caw lianas like tapirs. "Pachyderms," the Prof said.

There was one good angle to it, though. We didn't have to hack trail; they did it and we could toddle along practically upright, as good as monkeys anyhow. And they fed us—lye-softened corn tortillas and red hot meat that could have been monkey, and then again could have just as well been dog that's easier to catch; and of course cocoa with sticks of vanilla orchid pods to stir it with. Stuff to stick to your ribs, so I knew there was some hard going ahead and they wanted us to get there alive. I had my qualms wondering why.

The Indios were polite enough; I mean they didn't prod us with knives or knock us silly with clubs, like those scalp-tingling yarns about our own old-time Indian troubles. Authority halooed orders from

ahead and we halted or twisted whatever way he said. A few days of that was as much as my nerve could stand—just scrabbling along through dim wet jungle, knowing nothing of where or why. I tried to talk to our nearest *machetero* guards and I knew damn well from their knowing looks that some of them could understand enough Spanish; but they just put on their owlish expressions and shook their heads. But they passed the word to the one in command up the line and, come afternoon cocoa snack about ten days along, His Nibs dropped around to call. And I got a cold jitter through my sweat.

The guy was masked! In shiny tin this time—and not with a jaguar skull on top—with a pink spoonbill's skin and long beak.

And why, you'll want to know, should a pretty water bird give me a qualm? Because that was Xipe again. Xipe had an-

He wore a pink spoonbill mask with a long beak.

other hat too, the blue *cotinga;* I knew they represented Earth, Heaven and Hell, but just when he meant Hell I didn't know. The Prof didn't know either, but he was ready to lecture heathenishly: "The concept of a Trinity, my dear Dave, is no Christian prerogative. It has been found in all early religions in all countries; a fact that offers some most interesting speculations for those who are interested in the evolution of religions; which; however, is not my subject. This man is obviously a priest again of whatever cult it is that has survived amongst these people."

I'd never had much dealings with priests at any time and the more I learned about those with ancient Mayan cults the less I liked 'em.

This one didn't mind talking; he said we were going to the "Place of the Old Ones" and that was as much as he would say. The Prof quivered like he'd been told we were going home for Christmas. "He can mean nothing other than that they're taking us to my pyramid. Surely it can be nothing else."

I said, "Yeah. But *why* are they taking us?" His pyramid, he was calling it already. What I was wondering was, was it his, or Xipe's?

He said, "And do you know, my good pessimist, why his mask doesn't rust? Because it isn't tin, it's silver."

"So what?" I said. "I'm poor at sums, but I know that all the silver one man can dig up and carry away any fine night that he escapes from a gang of machete cultists amounts to about fifteen hundred bucks' worth; which is pretty poor treasure hunting."

He said he wasn't interested in silver. "So then what?" I asked him again. What was this "priceless" loot he was after that couldn't let him think about anything else connected with bloody old Mayan pyramids? And that sent him all dreamy-eyed again. "I'll tell you," he said, "if they do take us to a pyramid—I mean, to my pyramid of which I think I have deciphered the correct translation from the glyphs."

"I suppose you'll scream it to me," I said, "as a last minute item of good news just before they rip you under the fifth rib with an obsidian knife and drag out your pulsing heart and shout, 'Heil, Papa Zotzilaha Chimalmam and his raw red Son Xipe!' "

Sure I was pessimistic. Mexico is a civilized country—at least, in most of its spots. Indios don't snatch white folks and take them away into the back woods unless they're pretty damn stubborn and got secrets, and what I know about primitive people's secrets, they're as nasty as Nazi. The Prof had nary a doubt; he had come to dig into a secret loot and here we were in secrets up to our necks; so the way he figured it, he was right on his way to "something fabulous." How he was going to get away with it, he seemed to be leaving up to me that he'd hired as his trouble-shooter. Well, I'd be glad if we'd just get away with our skins and back to a peaceful life.

WE CRAWLED along that way, in mental darkness as dim as the thick woods, doing our good four or five miles a day, for . . . I don't know, I lost count. The silver-faced wizard every now and then pulled a queer stunt and he was so sure of things, he didn't care who looked on. What he'd do was pull off a little ways from the camp-fires—I should say, the camp smokes—and he'd drink something out of a gourd, bowing to the four *bacabs* —that's the little gods of the four compass points. Then he'd settle himself and begin calling on the name of Tezcatlipoca, intoning it sort of like a bell. Tez was the god who rushed around on the four winds of the *bacabs* and so he knew everything that was going on everywhere. If we had him, he'd be the god of Associated Press.

So the wizard would call Tezcatlipoca and take another slug out of his gourd and then call him again; and presently he'd begin to get glassy-eyed and dopey—which was no more that I'd expect, taking it raw like that. But the Prof got all steamed up about it.

"Good Lord!" he said. "That must be the *iage* or *caapi!* We are seeing the fantastic thing happen before our eyes."

I don't know whether it was honest magic or just some of the hocus-pocus those fellows have to do to impress the peasantry. But in a little while the wizard would drink himself cock-eyed and mutter himself plumb hypnotized. Like those

dopes who flew, though not so deadpan dumb. His eyes would remain wide and he'd cock his head like listening and then his lips would move like talking back.

"It is the *telepatina,*" the Prof whispered. "Just as Doctor Bayon described it. He is talking to an attuned mind; or perhaps to the *iagepai,* the visionary midgets who carry messages."

A funny thing about education up to the eyebrows is that you know so much you can believe anything can happen—or nothing. Not that I don't have an open mind; I can swallow anything anybody'll show me, but no visionary midgets. Anyhow, in about half an hour the wizard would groan out of his binge and he'd have all the news. Some of our machete guards were talking to us now and they'd say, "He has been consulting with the One Who Orders." Which was easy enough for any priest to tell his true believers and so long as he didn't guess wrong too often his stock would hold good. But one time after he'd gone through his act they told us: "He says that the Mexicatl Teohuatzin has ordered another party of nine men to meet us and then we must turn east."

That meant the very boss high priest, and in the good old days he was the lad who threw his trance and had a revelation about the date the gods wanted for the next sacrifice of prisoners and how many hundred of 'em. Maybe a name as powerful as all that had some authority over the *iagepai* midget telegraph messengers, for damned if it didn't click!

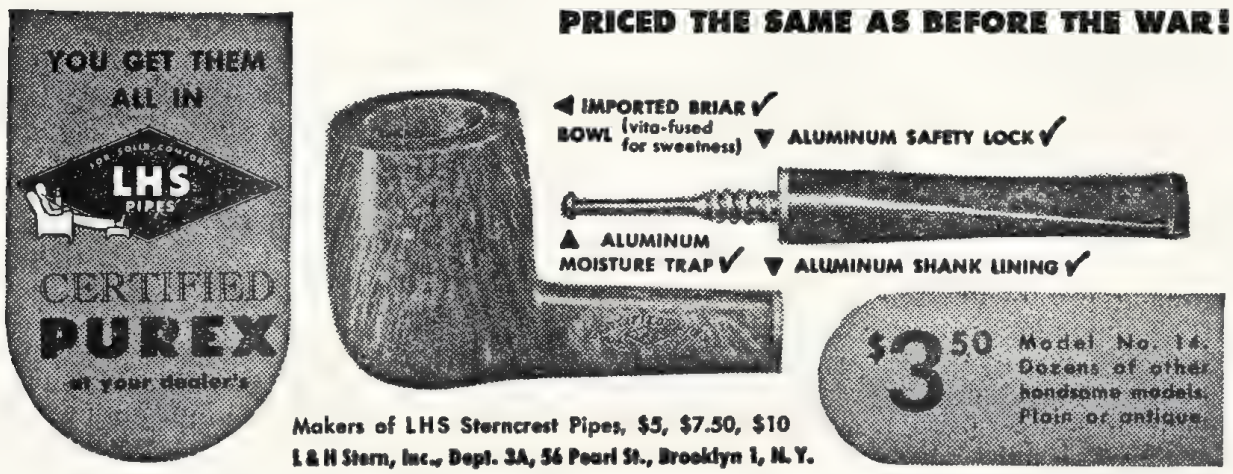
Two days farther on there was a halloo from over to our left and a party of exactly nine men sloshed through the woods to join us, and who was one of them but our mummy of the Tajin with the jaguar hat!

He went through a set of high signs with Spoonbill, which, if I knew anything about it, I'd say they were Masonic; and then he came over to the Prof and said, "I warned you."

I couldn't see his expression, of course. But I sure didn't like that word, warned. It sounded too like we'd stuck our face into something nasty and it was nobody's fault but our own. But it never fazed the Prof, even if it soaked in. Nothing would suit him but he must try out that *caapi* drink. Spoonbill's voice that we couldn't see through his silver mask chuckled. He said, "It will make you very sick, for the *iage* requires an apprenticeship of many years. But you are a student of the ancient mysteries, so you will doubtless consider the experience worth while." Anybody who was interested in their ancient mysteries they considered tops.

They had him sit apart and they gave him a couple of nips, no more; and they were right with some to spare. The Prof was as sick as I've ever seen a poisoned dog. So sick, it left him dizzy—maybe dopey, I don't know. Anyhow he went dreamy-eyed. When he came out of it he said he hadn't heard any news, but he was a whole lot pepped up.

"I am experiencing an extraordinary exhilaration, an uplift beyond all mundane worries. And as a matter of fact, that is what MacCreagh reported of the Amazon Tucana tribes. They called this *caapi* the "drink that makes men brave" and they made use of it in a ritual of defying the evil spirits of the jungle. And true enough, I feel that I am afraid of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nothing. I am care-free of whatever may befall."

I told him, "Yeah, I've seen it happen to people from something mixed by a wizard of a barkeep."

He laughed at me; he was sure having none of my worries about what we were heading into. Not even as he handed me the exact cause of them. "And don't you see, my obtuse friend, it is probably this *caapi* that accounts for the intrepidity of those flying men as they went into their dangerous ritual; and also, no doubt"—this was what got me—"for the apparently hypnotized calmness, as Bernal Diaz points out, of victims who went unresisting up the pyramid steps to certain sacrifice."

He was so pepped he didn't even know he'd said a mouthful. I was remembering what the other *sabio,* the ethnologist, had said about somebody needing some more sacrifice if anybody should get killed at the flying pole fiesta; and I had my own theory about why our jailers were being so all-fired polite to us too. I told the Prof about it later, when he wasn't so hooched up he couldn't think, and, by golly, that gave him the first jolt I'd seen him take.

CHAPTER IV

TREASURE HUNTING IN HELL

A FEW days later the wizards, both of 'em, went into their *caapi* trance and gave out a press bulletin that we'd pick up another gang day after tomorrow afternoon . With both of 'em on the beam it ought to click, and it did. Half a dozen men and two women joined in; it looked like a gathering of the clans for Christmas turkey. One of the women would have passed for a beach brunette and had a figure that would have got her into the final judging in any bathing beauty contest; and she dressed the part too—just the lower part, in a maguey cloth apron.

Even the Prof took notice. But what he said was, "You will observe that these women are no subservient slaves to their lord and master men; they seem to be on a basis of equality. There is no doubt in my mind that these people are some remnant of a superior civilization."

"Sure," I said. "Maya—Muya—Lemuria.

One of the women would have passed for a beach brunette.

Like your Churchward wrote; and if the women have so much say-so maybe one of us could work up a Pocahontas act and have her save our neck."

"Why not?" he said. "Why don't you try?"

Which I didn't mind trying. I sloshed alongside of the prize winner and started to pour out the fatal charm, and what scared me again was that nobody chased me—they acted like I was a hungry G.I. and the world owed her to me.

So well, we slogged along that way, as determined as mud turtles, till I figured we must be getting into Guatemala at least, if not Panama. And then one day the boys told us, "Tomorrow we arrive."

"Where?" I asked.

"At the Place of the Teocalli," they said.

I told the Prof, "The Place of the Beautiful God," and he showed me his erudition. "*Theos,* meaning God, and *kalos,* beautiful. It's practically classic Greek. How did they get it?"

"I know," I told him. "The Greeks got it from them by way of Lemurian migration through Atlantis before it sank."

He didn't take credit for all the baloney he'd taught me; he only grunted, "Getting clever, aren't you?" I told him, yes, and I knew something more too—that some of

the *científicos,* as they argued about their guesswork, twisted the translation round to mean, "The Beautiful Place of the God." And at that he whooped.

"That means a temple, or pyramid. *My* pyramid!"

And of course it was. But what a let-down! When people talked about a pyramid I thought of something like the Teotihuacan or Uxmal or Chichen-Itza—things as big as those in Egypt. This thing we'd come to was just a dump. Oh, big enough, a small hill; but just a great pile of rubble that had weathered off in the course of centuries and rolled down to cover up whatever stairways and such all. It would take a Smithsonian expedition to clear it up and hope to find on ancient carved rock underneath.

Nobody lived there. They'd be batty if they'd ever want to in that oozy jungle. But there were a lot of temporary shelters, lean-tos and rain sheds. You could see that some of them were left-overs from a couple of years back, patched over with fresh palm leaf. Some fifty Indios were camping around, men, women and kids, most of 'em the good-looking light-skinned type.

The Prof whispered like he'd discovered something. "A remnant, obviously, of an old, old race."

So what? All the *científicos* agree that Mexico is mixed in with old, old races, likely enough the crowd that built the pyramids. What I was worrying about was whether the gang had been collected up to sit in at some nasty old, old rite.

Silver Face did the honors. He told us, "You are welcome. A house will be given to you and food will be brought by young women."

The Prof said, "Well now, that is hospitable enough, surely, to allay your worries."

Maybe, I thought—but why did they bring us under machete guard? The machete boys turned us loose and Silver Face and Jaguar Hat went off together. That was all. We were free.

Swell of them. So now we could go wherever we wanted. We could start hiking back through I didn't know how many miles of jungle and in any direction I couldn't guess. And how far would we get? Go on, *you* tell me. I didn't even try to figure. The Prof said, "We must examine this pyramid."

NOBODY stopped us. They didn't mind us heathen prowling around their church. So we prowled. It was, like I just said, a great mound of rubble. It could have been any of those old volcano vent hills in the jungle; only that somebody kept it trimmed off of the bigger trees. You could see that nobody used it except for special occasions—like this one.

So then I began to grow a hope that maybe the pyramid didn't have any nasty connection with us after all and I asked the Prof what he thought. He said, "Pyramidology is not my subject. Unless, of course, this would turn out to be *my* pyramid of the glyphs. Let us go round and see what is on the other side."

We sloshed along a path through solid waist-high cactus, the kind that's so thorny they grow it for hedges to keep the hogs out of the yam patch. And round at the back they'd scratched away enough of the old rubble to show the usual wide crumbly steps going up to the top; and I let out a whoop as the hope I'd been growing sprouted 'way up.

Not for the steps. I grabbed the Prof by the arm and I yelped, "Look! This crowd of cultists, whatever they've forgotten or twisted around, are Christians!"

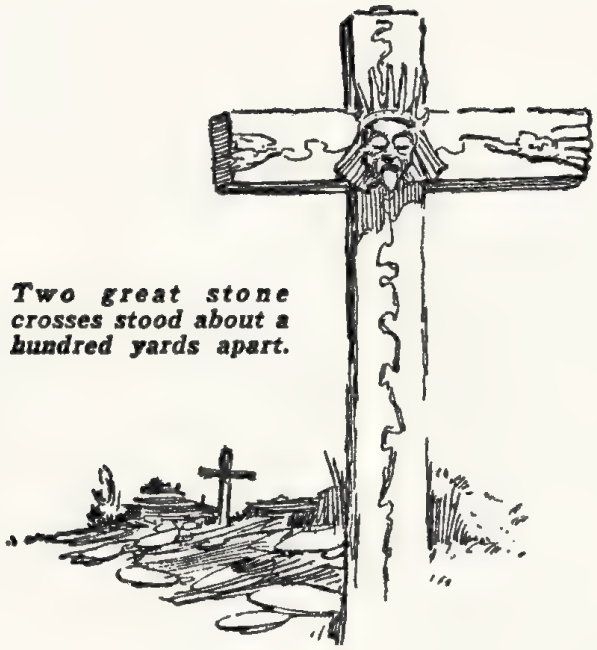
What I'd whooped for was standing up solid and comforting as a church, even for a guy who didn't patronize them any more'n I did. Two great stone crosses, no less!

About a hundred yards apart they stood; one of 'em man height and the other some four times as high. Hacked out of single great chunks of stone by loving hands, like the old Indio converts used to do in the front yards of every old cathedral started by the Franciscan monks who came with Cortez.

The Prof let out a yelp too; or rather, he sucked it in through his teeth and he whispered it out, "It is! It can be no other. *My* pyramid!"

I was feeling a whole lot better than I had ever since we'd stuck our necks into this gamble. I said, "All right, you stand well with the masked priests because you're a student of the ancient mysteries; so you get permission and I'll dig this pile away for you single-handed and let's get at the treasure."

He couldn't tell a lie; he took his little



Two great stone crosses stood about a hundred yards apart.

hatchet and hewed his first nick out of my sprouting little peach tree of hope.

"They aren't crosses," he said.

He'd laughed at my ignorance often enough, so this was my turn. Heck, I could see them, couldn't I? I walked up and made sure I wasn't pipe dreaming. I slapped my hand against the littler one. Good solid stone by loving converted hands. I even knew where there was another one exactly like it in front of the oldest old convent near Mex City. And just like that one, this one was different. What I mean, the ends of the arms were carved into three fingers and right in the middle was a face. A bit crude, it was, of course, and pretty weather-worn; but a face with its tongue hanging out; and it had a thorny spiky crown around its forehead too. So I laughed and hooted the Prof.

He couldn't stand being laughed at. He took another slash at my tree. "Look at that face. The round eyes, the flat nose, the hanging tongue. It's the same as the center of the ancient Calendar Stone in the museum of Antiquities in the City. The Sun God. And the crown isn't thorns, they're sun rays."

And, by damnation, it was so! My knees went limp and I had to lean against the thing. "But then, what about the other one?" I blatted. "The one in front of the convent?"

"Carved," he said, "doubtless by some Indian slave under the whip and allowed to stand by ignorant people who did not, at that time, know the symbolic significance."

"Well, what the—" I was beginning to be scared of the thing and I backed off of it.

"It is an *acolmite,*" the Prof said, like that explained everything. I guess my tongue must have been hanging out as long as the pop-eyed foolish faces, so he went into his classroom lecture: "The cross, my dear David, was a marker monument long ages before it became a Christian symbol. In Egypt it was erected along the Nile banks to mark the rise of the yearly flood, and when the water rose as high as the crosspiece it was known that there would be a good crop and there was general rejoicing. In Ur of the Chaldees, before the Mesopotamic silt caused the recession of the Red Sea coast line, there was a cross at what was the Bahr El Iddin, used as a range marker for mariners. In Maya times such markers had an astronomical function, as had also their pyramids—and for that matter, too, the Pyramids of Cheops and Khephren."

FOR a man whose subject was not pyramidology he sure knew a whole lot about them. I wished I'd had a Harvard education instead of just good common sense. "You mean," I said, "these things are gun sights, to pick out when the sun would be in the third house of Venus and in trine with the moon?"

I had to let him know I wasn't entirely dumb. I'd paid five good bucks to an astrologist once to have my fortune done on a chart and he used all those magic words. I remembered them five bucks' worth.

Damn if he didn't agree with me. "Probably to plot the course of Venus, that had considerable pre-Mayan importance," he said. "And you can see, sighting between the first two fingers of this left hand, over the top of the farther cross, you get a line to what must have been the truncated cone of the pyramid before it crumbled; and beyond that is where Venus should appear in the sky at certain times. Similarly, sighting over the ninety-degree angle of this arm to the top of—"

I couldn't hear him any better than I could understand his heavenly bodies. My head was buzzing. He had chopped my sprouting hope tree plumb to kindling. I was so worn flat—yes, and mad at all his superior lessons—that I gave him what I'd been holding off these many days so as not to worry him.

"All right then," I said. "I can't argue with you, you've got it all down pat. So now listen while I tell you what I know about Mayas and whoever it was that was pre-Maya, like you say these near-blonds are a left-over from. Listen good:

"They've been polite, haven't they? They've fed us, hacked a path through the thorny lianas for us, and now they're giving us a cozy home and women to rustle the chow, and I'll bet it'll be the best they've got. And d'you want to know why? When the Mayas needed some sacrifices they picked the best of their prisoners and fed 'em and clothed 'em and gave 'em girls to play with; and when the sun, or Venus or whatever it was, hit the right spot over the range finder they marched the whole troop of 'em up the pyramid and sure 'nough sacrificed 'em. Sun gods and Venus gods and Bat gods with skinless Xipe sons, all got their quota. So I'm wondering which god the range finders will point to, come the next bright day."

That got under his lecture room hide all right. It had all been lessons to dummox me up till now; but this was putting us on an even footing, right up our own little alley that we'd busted our way into. I thought he ought to know all about those bloody Maya tricks already; and maybe he did, only he'd never thought it could happen here. He looked at me like half doubting. So I felt mean enough to give him some more.

"And I'll tell you what isn't guessing or believing travelers' tales out of old books. At Chichen Itza, that isn't such a helluva distance from hereabouts, is the Sacred Well. There they'd give the picked boys and girls a grand party and weigh 'em down with jewelry and heave 'em in—and if you want to doubt that, I know the American consul who wangled a permit and got a diver to go down and fish up a truck load of bones with the gold bracelets still on 'em."

Yes, he knew about that, because it was modern history and some of the museums got some of the loot. He didn't have any lecture to give this time. He was swallowing great lumps, digesting it all down. But he had guts; he wasn't ready to quit. He said, "Those victims were bred to believe it was an honor to be sacrificed and so they possibly didn't try to escape. We—"

I couldn't grow another hope tree. Like I said, I had hard common sense. Escape? Hell, they could treat us like princes while they waited for their astronomy to swing around, but they'd be watching us by the second; they'd catch us within the first mile.

And they proved it right now. Silver Face and some of the boys came edging round their rubble pile to see what all we were doing with their crosses that weren't any Faith, Hope, and Charity, but were range finders to a date in the sky.

The Prof had his guts all right. He said, "We can't let them see we are afraid." And he peered and sighted along the arms and fingers of those cursed *acolmite* things and made some of the old Maya noises that he'd learned out of books, and durned if Silver Face didn't just coo over him. He had me translate that the Prof was *sabio el mas simpático* and, what always seemed to impress them most, that he was a student of the ancient cultures, and he'd have to come and see the Mexicatl Teohuatzin himself. That was the One Who Orders.

The Prof took over where I had quit and started his own li'l hope tree. "If we can impress the high priest," he whispered, "this may be an opportunity for—" But he didn't have any idea for what.

They took us to our new home first; and I didn't like it one bit. It was quite one of the best bamboo and thatch huts in the clearing. And presently the promised women came along with supper, and I didn't like them a hoot either. They were beauties. This was too much like the old tradition of treating us like princes in order to fool the gods they were getting somebody worth while.

AFTER supper Silver Face and Jaguar Hat came together and took us off to the promised chat with the big shot. The Prof had been building high on this interview; but my liver, as the Indios say, turned to water and oozed out at my foot soles.

Mexicatl was masked and it might have been gold, for all I knew or cared. What set my back hair crawling was that his head gear was the blue *cotinga!* And that, if you remember, was the third emblem of Xipe! The one who liked his meat flayed before he got it!

This one was old too; you could tell by his hands that looked like somebody else's much bigger, peeled off and used like princes who knew all about astronomy—if there are any of that kind of prince these days; though, what I've heard, the Maya princes had to know all about it to qualify as the elite. It kept me guessing, first, to understand what the old wizard was saying, and then inventing to try and explain it to the Prof.

I didn't do so well, so there had to be a demonstration. They took us out to the crosses—I mean, the cursed range finders—and there was Venus blazing like an arc light over the shoulder of the pyramid. Only the range finders didn't range right. Even I could see that when you took sights over the notches that Venus wasn't where she should be. Where *he* should be, I mean, because his name used to be Tlauizcalpaantecutli, and with that much name to keep up with he was a hungry god and I'd seen him carved in stone as a snake with all of a man disappeared down his gullet but the guy's face that still struggled between the snake's teeth.

But it got the Prof all excited; all pepped up like he'd proved something. He said, "Tell them, why of course: That since the period, obviously very ancient, when these markers were set up, Venus, owing to the precession of the equinoxes, is quite perceptibly no longer where she used to be." And was that a helluva note to ask a guy to translate into Spanish! "But, tell them," the Prof promised like giving them back something they'd lost, "that in about some twenty-three thousand years or so she'll be back exactly where the old astronomers marked her." And he was all hepped up about it. So much that, though I couldn't care a whole lot what happened twenty-three thousand years from now, I had to ask him.

He said, "But don't you see, my dear man, that, even without delicate instruments, we can take the minute variation —" He could see I wasn't understanding,

It gave the Prof a turn when they served up a dish of roasted monkey hands on a banana leaf.

and he went into a schoolteacher's impatient rage. "We can roughly measure, my good fool, the distance between where Venus is now and where she would have been when these markers were set up, and we can then calculate back to their approximate date, whether Maya or pre-Maya or—" He went into a starry-eyed dream about it.

I was making all allowances for both of us being pretty well nerve-strained, but I didn't like being named a fool before company in that stupid-kid tone of voice. I said, "Or Mu. Your Lemuria before it sank, as proved by Alley Oop in the funnies."

For a wonder it didn't rile him this time. He was in his dreams. "At all events," he sort of whispered, "it would be evidence of cultured man on the American continent infinitely antedating Egypt or Chaldea. And then, if I have translated my glyphs correctly—"

He dreamed happily on. Sure I got it, but I couldn't enthuse. He meant, of course, if he'd read his maguey papers right his treasure story held good, and right here was the spot. Helluva lot of good whatever tonnage it might be of treasure would do a couple of prisoners being treated like princes, fattened for the kill till Venus would show up where

she ought not to be, but might have been when the marker were set up ten thousand years ago or whatever. Which left our date for doing the last mile up those pyramid steps pretty well up to the close harmony of friends Silver Face and Jaguar Hat and Mexicatl Teohuatzin.

They weren't hurrying about it. They left us to have our good times any way we liked; though how princes had any good time in all that rain that came through the thatch roof was beyond my guessing, and how they lived long enough for the fiesta before the bugs ate 'em up raw was another mystery. But the Prof harped back on his climatic changes and said it couldn't have rained so much in those gay old days. What I wondered was whether they hadn't perhaps softened up some of their jolly old customs in this modern rain. But my hope tree wouldn't sprout again.

CHAPTER V

FATTENED FOR THE KILL

THE women they sent to housemaid and waitress for us were the best on the lot. I could have been interested if I'd had the guts of the Prof, figuring a way out of where there wasn't any way. The chow, too, was a heap better than a lot I've lived through; wild pig and monkey and yams and all—though it did give the Prof a turn to have one of the blue-eyed cuties serve up one day a dish of roasted monkey hands on a banana leaf. Me, I never liked that gristly stuff, like pig knuckles and all.

And they brought us worse — what turned my stomach. Jewelry! What I mean, bead necklaces. Old, old crooked bits of stone that could have been jade, and some of 'em turquoise, that must have taken a month's work to bore a hole in each one with cactus thorns and sand abrasive. "Museum pieces!" the Prof breathed and had the nerve to wear his.

I told him, "All it means isn't that they're not honoring us sufficient; only that they've used up all the old family gold and silver pieces, heaving 'em into wells or burning 'em with loud hurrahs to Ixi-Poxi-Hoochi-Cattle or whatever twisted monicker he had."

He said, "If you are so infernally pessimistic why don't you do something, instead of just sitting waiting?"

As though these was anything a guy could do. Why didn't these other old-timers who were being fattened up like princes do something? Where would they run to, I asked him, and how far, with midget spooklets radioing their progress all the way?

He was getting sort of hot and bothered himself now, what with inaction and knowing nothing. I told him, "Well, for gossakes, let's put in our time digging for your treasure, since they let you do anything you like. We can at least look at it, even if we can't take it with us to where we're going."

But he said, sort of hopeless, "It's nothing that can be dug up."

"What d'you mean, not *up?*" I said. "It is something hidden in some small niche somewhere about the pyramid, or perhaps in some hollow in a stone idol. Perhaps one of the priests may make use of it when—" He gulped down the rest of the when.

And if I hadn't already been lower than the belly scales of a lizard would that have left me flat! Not about the loot not being buried; but about the words, small, little. Migod, it'd have to be diamonds to make it worth while; and nothing I'd ever heard about the Mayas, or Pre-Who-ever-they-were, ever said anything about the Mex jungles growing diamonds.

The Prof wouldn't elucidate. All he'd say was that it was one of the most ancient sacred symbols in the world and therefore "priceless," and he clammed up on his personal translations of his blasted old maguey papers like he had something religious that mere laymen mustn't meddle into. I've noticed that about those hard-bitten *científicos.* Nothing sordid about them; they don't want money; all they want is something nobody else has got; and let 'em get onto a secret, they hug it like their hope of heaven—those that are so stuffed with education, they don't believe in heaven. Me, I'd stuck my neck into this, looking for sordid money, and I wouldn't have stuck it half a mile beyond jungle fringe if this crazy clever fanatic hadn't outsmarted me, talking words like fabulous, and priceless.

But I couldn't believe him all that

much of a nut—heck, he was Harvard, wasn't he? I said, "Well, I suppose you've got some millionaire angel who'll buy it for pet museum."

And he said, "Well, yes." And, "Let us go and talk to the head priest." As though anybody ever got money out of a head priest.

So we went and squatted in the wet with Mexicatl of the blue *cotinga* hat, who hadn't a hut as good as ours. He was polite; he was cordial; he was our long lost brother—and he could keep secrets as well as the Prof. So we talked astronomy. What I mean, he talked sky-piloting that I couldn't understand and I invented explanations so the Prof would guess what he meant. The Mexicatl was awful interested in Venus. The Prof was just as interested in explaining to him all her straying from the ancient path in the sky.

ALL of the chatter got us nowhere; not to any little niches in idols, nor even to when might be the zero day. But Mexi did say, dodging around my questions, that his people were descended from Fair White Gods.

"Lordamighty!" I had to splutter. "That old Cortez baloney again?"

But the Prof shut me up; he was eating it up. "He means, supermen, of course, you fool," he said.

I couldn't even kick at being a fool any more. And the blond supermen came, old Mexi said, from a great island in the West where they had known all about everything—like flying and all that. But they got too smart, it seemed, and the gods got mad at them and sank the whole kit and kaboodle of them.

So there it was again. "Lemuria, Muya, Maya—and, for that matter, the old Bible flood and the Polynesian inundations and the Tower of Babel or whatnot—I'm not up on those things, nor I wasn't giving a faint hoot either. Even the Prof was so low that he couldn't get steamed up about proving anything.

All he could lecture was something out of the Bible that I didn't know he'd ever read. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy," he mumbled.

I said, "C'mon, let's get back to the girls they've given us. They at least have golden, sunburnt faces and not a gold mask; and I'm taking your advice on 'em too."

"What do you mean?" he said. "I never advised you about women."

But he had too. "Pocahontas," I reminded him. And true too. I wasn't building a whole lot on it; but I was trying my sweaty, unshaven durnedest to make the proper hit with Hedy and with Lana and with Myrna—I couldn't sort out their other names. Not that anybody handicapped like I was, what with trying to say pretties under a dripping tree and my hide wrinkled leper white, could expect to get anywhere fast; but they were sort of cooperative. They didn't know any of the rules of civilized catch-as-catch-can, but they sure didn't mind who looked on from under the next wet eaves, any more'n a Saturday Coney-Islander.

It was the Prof who added some cold water to the warm rain. He said, "If your pessimistic theory is correct, they won't be of any value to us, however successful may be your amours. If we are being fattened, as you say, for the feast, they will come with us."

It sure shook the ardor. But if they knew all about their cursed hang-overs from some beastly old religion, how come they could giggle and slap back?

He said, "They are in the limelight, the cynosure of all the populace, and all women enjoy that." He surely had tumbled off of his own flourishing hope tree. "And furthermore," he hammered in another nail, "it is possible that they are being given small doses of the *caapi* drug and are abnormally exhilarated beyond concern for the future."

I went to Silver Face and told him I wanted a daily slug of *caapi*. He was polite. He said, "The women will bring it." And that was worse than if he'd said no. If I'd be needing something to deaden pure stark fear, Migod!

But, well, the way things turned, I never got it. There was what Army used to call a diversion. Not meaning fun, but the enemy cutting in from another angle. Excitement buzzed around the hut warren. The masked *tlenemacacs* remained in long huddles. They drank the magic hooch and talked out loud to their invisible midgets; and at last Silver Face came and gave us their wireless long distance. It

whooped me up more than a barrelful of any booze.

"White men are coming," he told me.

"White men? Here? How did they ever find their way, and why?"

"Bad men," he said. I didn't believe him. I was ready to count any white men as pure shining angels.

"They have caught some of our people," the old boy said sadly, "and they are torturing them, the same way the first white men did, to show them the way. They come with guns and we cannot at present prevent them."

At present? I found out suddenly that I knew how to say a prayer and I said it out loud, the way our colonel used to: "Dear Lord, let the advance hold its drive."

AND it worked; as well as it so often did for the colonel; even though my call didn't have, like his, a lot of us boys helping it hell and blazes on. Seven men, the hooch voices said, and they'd be here in four days. And they were as right as press despatches. Third day we heard some shooting; meaning, with a fair wind, about five miles, and it would take any relief party a day to shove through that jungle.

But by what miracle a relief party, the Prof was asking; and who could have sent them—or rather, it? That guy had to be grammatical even in the face of a miracle. I wasn't counting on any miracles for me in the jungle. I told him, "I'll give you one good guess and I'll bet my half of your priceless loot hidden in an idol's belly on it."

That learned innocent couldn't guess. But *you* can. You know as well as I did that it wouldn't be anybody but that same gang of claim jumpers who'd been so hot on the Prof's treasure hunt trail. Nor it didn't take any telepathy to tell me how come. They were smart, those boys; plenty smart enough not to believe our yarn about going home after the flying pole fiesta, and tough enough to grab off a couple of Indios and put the screws on 'em to squeal.

It turned out they'd grabbed two of those doped flying initiates of the cult and they sure had put the screws to 'em. They had no dope in 'em now and when the gang busted into the clearing the two were bled pure white and close to dead.

But I was gladder to see those ragged bandits than ever I'd been to see my discharge papers. For the first time in a coupla months I could pull in a full breath and let it go with a whoop. I could have kissed every bearded, sweaty son of a mad dog of 'em. I didn't know their religions, but I was sure as hell they wouldn't be Zotzilahas or Xipes who treated prisoners like princes till they were ready to eat.

And good and right I was too. They didn't treat us like princes. The boss of the gang, that same big lug I'd conked in the saloon, staggered up to me—he was pretty near crazy with the trip and the rain and bugs and all—and he didn't throw any arms around me as a white compatriot.

He said, "So you're the clever bastard who horned in on our game, huh?"

And the two punks that I'd met at the fiesta were with him of course and they

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yippeed like they'd run down a possum. "Yah!" they howled. "Old Shotgun Dave himself! Li'l ol' D.D.T., no less. Let us at him, Hoimie; he slapped us down back in town there."

But Hermie, the big baboon one, said, "Me, I'm first. The big so-and-so socked me the first minute we met and here's where he gets it back." And he hauled off and smacked me square over the mouth; and in the same second the two punks jumped in, ki-yieing, and started swinging on me.

Well, I didn't want to get into any fight with the rescue party. I just wanted peace and good will and get the hell outa there. But what could I do but kick the punks one apiece in their stomach to hold 'em a while . I told Hermie, "What they said about D.D.T. is right, and it's here." And I plastered him a nice fast one under his chin from my belt line up and lots of ugh to it.

So he ughed and I had just half a second to see him lift off his feet and drop, and then another one of the gang swung his pistol barrel across my ear and that was lights out for me.

And that ape wasn't fooling. It wasn't whether *I* lived that was important; it was the Prof they wanted whole and talkative.

I didn't come out of that smack until along about evening; and when I did they had the situation pretty well in hand. That is to say, most of the Indios had beat it into the jungle; all the younger ones, anyway; though they'd caught some of the women and the old wizards who couldn't run, Jaguar Head and old Mexicatl himself.

What brought me out of my long dark was hearing the Prof yelping, "Ouch and Oo-ooh!" and groaning, "But I tell you I don't know where it is; and it's not what you think anyhow. It isn't buried treasure. There never was any buried treasure."

They had him tied to a tree stump and they were sweating him for the dope. They just laughed at him when he said there was no hidden hoard.

"Oh yeah?" Hermie said. "You think we're as damned fool like yourself? What'd you stake yourself to this trip for? To collect peanuts in the woods? Ya silly goat, you lectured to all your snooty college boys that you'd doped out a paper with all the info about a priceless treasure. And we know some of the boys, see? Don't come any o' that innocence on us. Give his arm another twist, Buzz."

Buzz did and fetched a screech from the Prof. But what could the Prof tell? I was sure enough he hadn't been holding out on me when he said we'd have to try and worm some information out of the priests. They'd have to kill him and still get nothing. I guess they would too, they were that mad. And then I heard a voice that spoke college. Perhaps not pure Harvard, but this boy had been to school.

He said, "Certainly he's playing innocent. Steve Vanesky from the college gave me his verbatim shorthand notes on the lecture and it stated definitely that the professor had deciphered records leading direct to 'a fabulous treasure' in these parts. But some of these intellectuals have an extraordinary stanchness of will. Better try the guide fellow a while. Very often those muscular men break easier than a brainy one."

Anyhow I was brainy enough to lie as stiff as a crowbar and pretend I was still out cold. Hermie and a gorilla called Jake came over and kicked me to see and I did pass out cold again.

CHAPTER VI

THE CURSE OF MEXICATL

I CAME out of it with rain falling on me, and it was morning and I was out in front of our hut on my belly with a rope tied to my wrists behind my back and hitched to a tree. Some of the gang was in the hut, laughing about something and then growling about, "So they think they don't have to talk, eh?"

Presently three others of the gang squelched into view, shoving along a half a dozen girls with basket covered with banana leaves. That would be breakfast, I figured, and my stomach turned at the thought. The apes shoved the kids along with guns at their backs like they might be hardboiled Heinie prisoners. You could see that, even though they had command of the clearing, they were still nervous about something.

One of the girls was Myrna. She cried

when she passed me—or maybe she'd been crying anyway, I don't know. I hollered to her, *"Anakuach, Chusi."* That was some of their lingo I'd picked up and it meant, "Cheer up, Little One." And I had to add in Spanish, "I'll get you out of this."

A fool enough thing to say, hog-tied like I was; but what can a man do after he's been spending weeks trying to persuade the girl that a loving gesture would be to get him out of a hellish jam? One of the gunmen trod carfully on my lashed wrists as he went over, and did that crunch! He said, "Get yourself out of it, Buddy, and you're doing good."

I told him, "I will, Punk, and I'll remember to thank you for it." So he just back-heeled me in the face and drove the girl on in with the grub. I couldn't see in, of course, but I could hear the kids scream every now and then and I wondered whether I liked my nice white compatriots any better than some of these savages who'd come a long way from white.

The gang took their time over breakfast and parlor sports and then big Hermie loafed out, picking his teeth, and said, "Well, let's give the professor another whirl."

And then I saw that the Prof had been lying out in the rain too behind the stump. They hoisted him up and I could see that he'd been getting the proper works yesterday. His face was swollen like a summer squash and blood-streaked heavy enough so even the rain hadn't washed him clean. He was near enough dead to make even Hermie stop and think. But they propped him up and Hermie tried him out once more.

"Remember me, pig-head? Can ya see me? I'm the guy that's going to find out where your boodle's hid . . . Will ya talk now?"

The Prof just swayed with his eyes closed—they were bunged pretty near shut. Hermie growled, "Aw hell!" and slapped him and his head lolled. The boys let him go and he flopped; he was so near dead they hadn't even tied him. "C'mon," said Hermie. "Let's see if the other bastard can be as tough."

They hoisted me up and couple of them held me against my tree and the Jake gorilla kicked me in the groin just as a starter. I would have doubled up but that my two holders straightened me out so Hermie could slap me till I got my breath.

I said, "Listen, you guys. This Prof isn't holding out. I tell you he don't know. All right, he's got something out of his old papers and it's somewhere around here, he thinks; but he don't know where it is."

Hermie laughed. "You tryin' to kid us a hard yegg like you came all this way on no more guarantee 'n that? Kick him another, Jake—but good."

Jake did, and I guess I must have groaned. Through the pounding in my ears I heard the Prof's voice, game guy, putting in a word for me: "He doesn't know anything; not as little as I do. I must repeat, we have found nothing."

My lower belly heaved up and I was able to vomit. That relieved the pain in my groin some and I could think a hazy bit. I tried to be clever—oh, damn clever. I said. "Sure. What d'you think we stuck around here so long for? We weren't tied down. They treated us like princes; only of course they wouldn't admit there ever was any loot. We were trying to worm a hint out of the old witch doctor."

And on that the Prof's voice came again, strong and angry. "Shame on you, Dave!" he croaked. "Shame for diverting their brutality onto those old priests."

"Well, hell, I had never meant it that way. I hadn't even known they'd managed to grab any of them. My thinking was whirling around dizzy anyhow. But it hit me like another smack in the face. Hanged if the Prof hadn't taken his beating and kept mum about the wizards. Damn right he had stanchness of will. And if he'd kept his mouth shut now my own dumb crack might have gone by without notice. But did his holler give Hermie an idea!

The whole gang whooped and Hermie snarled, "Someone kick me for a chump." I would have if I could. "Sure, those old buzzards would know. Bring 'em over, and, by the holy tripes, they'll squeal."

OLD Mexicatl and Jaguar Head had been slung in a hut, roped like calves for the branding. The boys kicked them out. Their masks had been smacked off, of

course, and I could see they were a lot older than I'd thought.

Hermie ordered, "Give 'em the back hoist first and let's see what they'll take."

The back hoist is something the Japs taught some of our boys. You just tie the poor devil's hands behind his back and throw the rope over a tree limb and hoist; that's all. The trick is to inch up on the rope until, if the guy won't talk, it tears the shoulder sockets out.

"Thet older one'll likely break down soonest," Hermie said. I wondered where he'd learned his stuff. I was damn sure he'd never been in the Army and captured. I wouldn't put it beyond him and the rest to have thrown in with the invaders as they grabbed some of our islands and collaborated. So they tied the two old fellows up and put the lift to them.

Talk about an Indian being stoic and taking it. I guess that sort of guts belongs with the whole race, whether they're pale mud white and say they stem from a fairy tale island in the Pacific, or whether they're red and we guess they started from Mongolia. Old Mexicatl, done up in macaw feathers and a faded poncho, like I'd always seen him, had looked just a funny old faker to me; but now, doubled forward as he was, with the devilish pull on his arms behind him, he could still lift his head and glare right back on his torturers and he looked like —well, like a sure 'nough priest. What I mean, like some of those old evangelists who went West before our own Indians were tamed and they got scalped and all the rest of it while the savages whooped around. Like a man who's really got something to him. This crowd of treasure snatchers didn't exactly rate as savages, I suppose; but only because they didn't paint their faces and wore white men's pants. But they whooped as old Mexicatl groaned. But he didn't squeal. He glared back at them like that and never a peep out of him. His lips moved, sort of awful deliberately and slowly, mouthing out words, and they weren't pleading either.

"He is calling the names of the old gods," the Prof said. "Putting the ancient curses of all the elements on you." He sounded like he was scared of the stuff himself.

Hermie laughed his bull laugh. "Any old time," he said, "any old gods can do anything to me, they're welcome. Go ahead, boys, give the old crow another couple inches."

Well, what's the use of piling on the agony? Neither Mexicatl nor Jaguar Head broke; though their shoulder sockets did. Till Hermie—he certainly had learned his stuff somewhere—said, "Leave 'em hang a while; they'll soften. Maybe some of the women or kids know enough to give a hint. Kids are always nosey and find out secrets." So they let the old men hang by their ligaments and went to the kids.

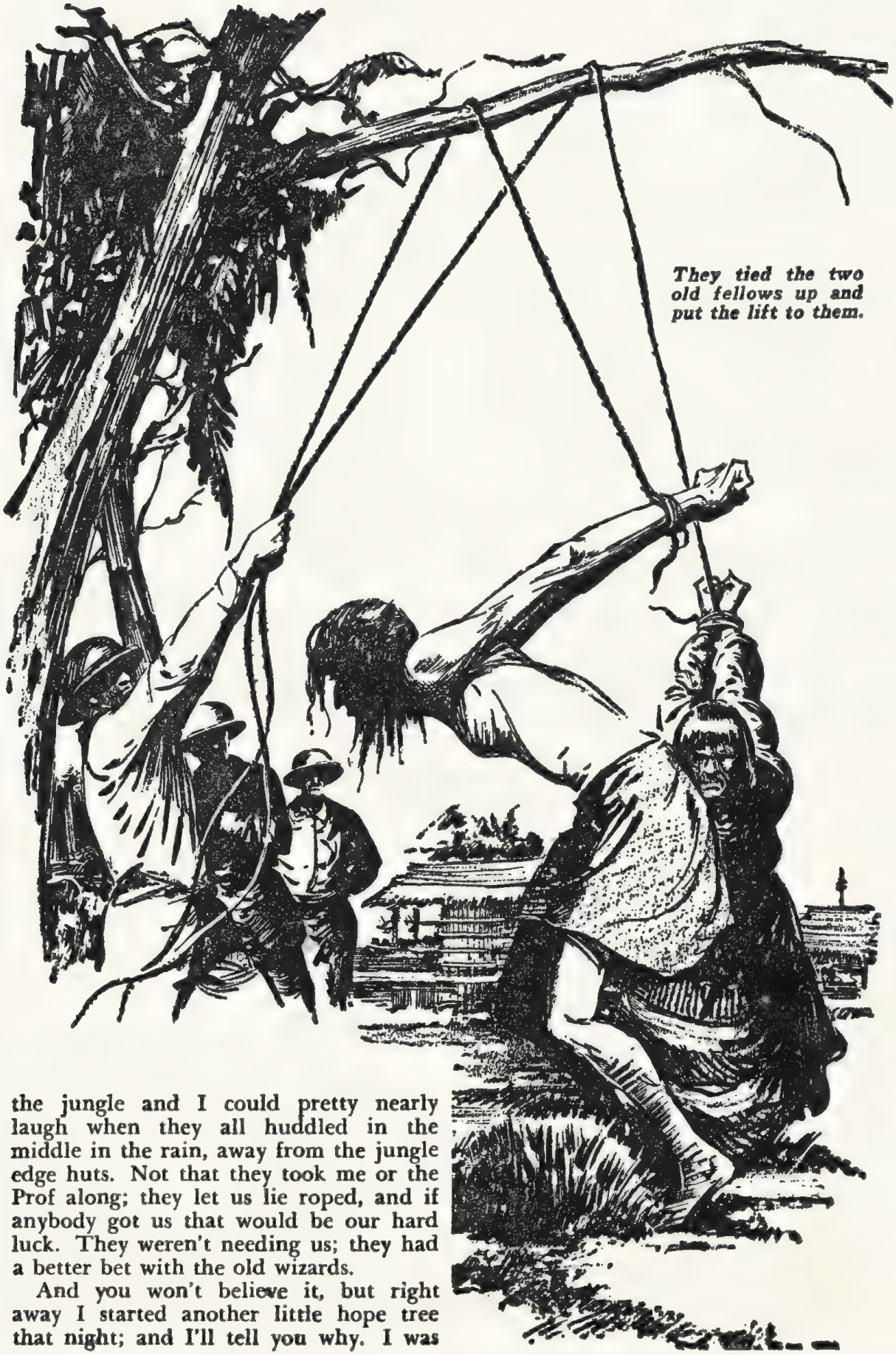
They figured, if the Prof could talk up that strong, they'd better hogtie him too; and they trooped off to some of the farther huts to see what they could do. I couldn't see, but I could hear some screeching. The Prof's voice said, "Good God! It is as pitiless as an inquisition."

Maybe it was; and we used to tell ourselves that that was something only the old Spanish Conquistador crowd did, saving souls and gouging gold out of Montezuma's people. But these good white compatriots of ours had learned all right. Perhaps it was the war, I don't know. Perhaps just gold. All the yarns of treasure hunting I ever heard, somebody always sloughed the old inhibitions and went wolf. With this crowd the whole pack did. They'd come for gold and anybody in the way was slated to get hurt. They spent a whole hellish day going over prospects. They got nothing, because they came back as savage as timber wolves; some of 'em looking like butchers. They kicked me, going by, just for fun.

Hermie snapped, "Better let those old medicine men down. We don't want 'em to die on us."

I was a whole lot better off than some, since I'd been lucky enough to get that crack across the skull and I hadn't been given the real works. I felt good enough to be mean. I told the gang, "All right, I don't suppose you're going to feed me and I can stick that out; but in case you may be wanting me yet, just leave me tied out center of the clearing; because these Indios use the blow gun and *curare* darts and by now some of 'em you didn't catch will be creeping back at night."

It was a lie of course. I'd never seen a blow gun among these boys. But it gave the gang something to add to their nerves about what might yet come out of



They tied the two old fellows up and put the lift to them.

the jungle and I could pretty nearly laugh when they all huddled in the middle in the rain, away from the jungle edge huts. Not that they took me or the Prof along; they let us lie roped, and if anybody got us that would be our hard luck. They weren't needing us; they had a better bet with the old wizards.

And you won't believe it, but right away I started another little hope tree that night; and I'll tell you why. I was

beat up enough to be dead dog-tired and I was able to do a fair imitation of sleep. Which I came out of with a yelp and something pawing over me. The something said, *"Ass-ssk!"*—which is the same as our "Hush!"—and it was one of my girls! It was hell black but I judged it Lana's voice. They hadn't caught Lana. She said, "The Silver Mocuatzin says, *'Anakuach.'* There will be a rescue."

Have you ever said prayers to a single word? I wanted to; but all I could think was the way the colonel would say, "The raiding party will set their watches to mine and at exactly one hours, by God, we'll go after them."

THE Mocuatzin was Silver Face; they hadn't grabbed him either, being younger than the other two *tlenemacacs.* He was the one who had first picked us out of the jungle from the *chicleros* and did most of the invisible midget mumbo-jumbo. He had more git-up-an'-shove and I could believe he might organize something.

Lana said, "He has sent out the magic message and more of our people are coming. He wants to know how many shots those white men's guns will fire."

"Well, for gossakes," I said, "If he's fixing to stage a raid cut me loose and I'll be in it with blood in both hands. That gang is none of my relatives."

She said, "I dare not; otherwise they will kill all the prisoners, trying to find out; and moreover, says the Silver One, they will thus be warned."

I didn't know whether I should try to kiss her or to grab her and beat sense into her to cut me free. But there was sense in Silver Face's thought that, if he was figuring to jump a gang of gunmen with just *macheteros,* it'd have to be a surprise job.

I told Lana, "There's just this much luck. None of 'em carry tommy guns. I saw only one rifle, an old thirty-thirty single shot that they must have black-marketed from somebody in Papantla village. There little guns that they could smuggle in baggage will shoot six times each and then it'll be a matter of how much time they'll get to reload."

She had to know how many shots was six times seven men. She'd come a long way from that old superior race if she couldn't do multiplication tables. I did the sum for her and she said, all right, the raid would be tomorrow night. It would have to be tomorrow because Tlauizcalpa-antecutli would be ready; and before I could ask her what that mouthful had to do with it she slid away into the dark.

The mouthful, you'll remember, was Venus. I lay wondering what the hell Venus could have to do with a raid and the best I could make of it was that she would be in trine with something or other that made for good hunting.

Of course I couldn't sleep any more that night, even though the rain quit and I steamed off some; and the longer I lay awake, the deader my little hope sprout withered. A rescue? Even if they pulled it off. From what? And for what?

From the gang, yes. But the gang, at worst, would beat me up and perhaps break a leg or so. But *for* what was the thing that crawled up and down my spine. For what had they been saving the Prof and me? And how much better would they be loving any white men after this? We'd all look pretty much alike to them, wouldn't we? Out of what frying pan into whose fire? All in all, Lana hadn't handed me such a much of *anakuach* cheer.

Morning took a hundred years to come. But at last I heard the watch the gang had posted for the night cussing out there in the middle of the clearing and the gang woke up and cussed back and daylight crawled through broken clouds. I could be grateful there'd be a little sun and I'd maybe get a chance to dry out.

The chow party went and untied the kitchen help and drove 'em to rustle breakfast. They took their time, like before, and then Hermie came to look us over. I was good enough to leave tied. The Prof, he figured, had better be loosened and given some tortilla wrapped around a yam, there being just a chance that some information could yet be twisted out of him; and then they settled down to go to work on the two old men again.

They slung the ropes over a limb and hoisted them to their feet—but I'll cut that again. It was the same technique; another inch on the rope; another smash in the face; another knee in the groin. Hot cigarette stubs too; all the devilish tricks in the list. Gold was what the gang had

come for, and, by hell and damnation, they were set to find it. They worked on those two poor battered old medicine men through the forenoon and all they got was madder by the minute. My two gun punks of Papantla were all for shooting chips off the prisoners' ears and other corners.

But that was where they made their error, putting and shooting idea into Hermie who was looking like a Halloween mask himself. He had his own gun in his hand half a dozen times and only held back by busting blood vessels in his fat neck and telling the boys, "By all hell, as long's they're alive I'll make 'em talk."

I'VE seen rages in my time—among drillers bosses when some brash crew man sassed them; but Hermie's was well up to the maddest. I suppose, in his time, he'd battered and burned men to squeal. But not those two old priests. He couldn't break them down. He wasn't used to that kind of guts and it was his own rage that broke him first. He went plumb berserk. He frothed and he gibbered what would have been cuss words if they'd had any syllables. It was something I couldn't believe to see old Mexicatl's near death face slowly twist to a grin.

That was the limit for Hermie. He smashed his fist into the half dead grin and then suddenly he snatched his gun and let the old man have it! Slam in the chest!

The old wizard slumped and the boys on the rope were so taken aback they let go and let him drop. Their ace in the hole! Whatever he knew blasted for keeps!

Nobody breathed for a long breath. Not a one of them dared even look at Hermie. He was mad dog enough right then to shoot it out with anybody who'd say a word. They just looked at one another from under their brows, mum scared of the boss.

It was the Prof who scrambled to action—they'd loosed him, I told you, and given him some food. He scuttled forward croaking, "Shame! Shame on you brutes!" and he made to pick up old Mexicatl. He wasn't able to lift him; but he halfway sat him up and felt into his blanket for the wound. You could see blood spout up his sleeve in great throbs.

But what use? The old man muttered something and the Prof said, "*Si, si.*" which was about the limit of his Spanish; and in about another gasp old Mexicatl Teohuatzin, who ought to know whatever might be about any hidden loot, took all his secrets with him to tell 'em to Zotzilaha of the dark bat wings or to Xipe, the one without any hide, or to whatever old gods took charge of such matters in his savage beyond. I figured he'd have something to tell them about civilized white men too.

The gang gawped like cart bullocks when they pass anything dead on the road. Still not a peep. Hermie damned them all and flung himself off; into the hut—to kick himself, I guessed, when he'd come to his senses. The Prof still fumbled hopelessly over the old man. Nobody said a word to him. The gang slouched off one way and another, their lips moving, but nothing loud. I, hog-tied, could just lie and look on. I wondered which one of them would work up nerve enough to shoot it out with Hermie.

My wrists were swollen under my two days of rope like they had gangrene. I thought here was a chance and I called softy to the Prof to leave the dead man and come over to a live one for a minute and perhaps I'd be able to creep up on someone and grab his gun and see who'd shoot it out with Hermie. But a pair of the apes heard me and came back.

"Gettin' ideas, huh?" That was Steve, one of my punks. "Tie up the old goat again, Stoop." And to me, "This'll stop your wrists hurting for a spell," and he rapped me across the eyes with his gun barrel, and I didn't feel wrists or anything for quite a while.

It had become a habit with me to come out of a trance, hearing yelling. This time I could recognize old Jaguar Hat's voice. I supposed some of the brighter boys were trying him out somewhere with some fancy technique of their own.

Hermie yelled out of the hut, "If any you guys can get any dope outa him, all right, I'll resign."

Hermie, the big yellow gorilla, had come to his senses and was having some private moments, thinking about what his gang was thinking.

Along about sundown the yelling quit and Hermie came charging out of the hut, hollering, "What have you blasted mon-

It was prisoners the Indios wanted—prisoners for the gods!

keys done?" All bulldoze and authority was Hermie again. I suppose he figured it was even-Stephen now. I could hear him off by the farther huts shooting off, "All we got is the fool of a professor now and his muscle man."

I looked to a rocky tomorrow that would make this last couple days feel like Momma's lap. The new little hope tree was flat dead. But there was Venus yet. The rain had quit since last night and, as the sun went behind the trees, there was old Tlauizcalpaantecutli like an arc lamp, near enough to reach out and fondle—if he really was meaning something to Silver Face and his marauder commando; though I couldn't shake the old pessimism. What good would it do us white prisoners either way?

Still and all, as the night closed in, I wished I could have set a watch to the colonel's time and could know just when was zero hour for whatever might be. I mean, I wished just at odd spells when I wasn't busy trying to kick my face with my foot. I don't have to tell you that mosquitoes and all the other bugs come marauding after a rain.

The gang was out in the middle like before. I could hear them cuss, "Only damned thing to do is pull your shirt over your head."

That went for the night guard too; so they couldn't hear so well. And that was when the other marauders came.

CHAPTER VII

THE SACRIFICE

I WAS plenty awake and swelling to the minute—I've never figured why mosquitoes always want to crawl into your ears and buzz. I heard nothing else. They crept in like jaguars—I mean the machete marauders this time, not the lance stabbers. And then the sudden racket that

busted into the night would have waked a dead 'un. Came a smothered yell from a guard and it was cut right in two by the chunky sound of a machete biting deep. A lovely sound. A sound like heaven arriving—and hell.

Then all the yelling the jungle could hold and not fall apart. White men, Indios, all together; and pistol shots. A hell of a lot of shots! Like I said, I hadn't seen any tommy guns, but those boys must have been experts at fast loading.

How long, I wondered, could the gang hold out against those yard-long machetes, at close quarters, in the dark and all? I was whooping, without thinking, for the Indios. Till it came to me with a jolt. The Indios weren't fighting to kill; they were fighting according to the old tradition—to take prisoners!

That was how Cortez and the Conquistadores didn't get wiped clean out on the night of the *Noche Triste* when they retreated along the old causeway, canals flooded and bridges down. The Indios wanted prisoners, not corpses. Prisoners for the gods!

And well, to cut it short, they got 'em. They got four, it turned out later. I don't know at what cost. When the scrimmage and the yelling finally burned out, torches came and the clearing was jam full of Indios; leaping shadows with tails—jaguar pets—they looked like a mop-up crew of devils. Some of them carrying off the casualties and most of them in a hurry to start a fiesta right now. They built fires in a ten-point star—that's the sun's rays, you know—and they got down to the serious business of dancing.

Somebody remembered to come cut me and the Prof loose and they said, "Come on, join in," and they rushed off to do their bit. It took me a good hour, at that, to work the deadness out of my joints and crawl over to give the Prof a hand. He was in worse shape than I; I mean, physically; but durned if he hadn't collected up his nerve and was as chipper as before we ever became old gods' prisoners.

He said, "Didn't those men say, *'Venga, amigo'*? And doesn't that mean, Come along, friend?"

"Sure," I told him. He was learning fast, but wasn't he forgetting we were their good friends all the while they were treating us like princes?

He was his old superior self. He knew it all. He said, "Good old pessimist. But don't you see, our status is quite different now. Our kind compatriots expatriated us from our white heritage and put us on a par with the savages."

I told him I wasn't feeling so proud of the white heritage myself just now and if he was so blamed sure we were as good as Indios, come on, let's put on feathers and get a torch and toddle in to cinch it.

We didn't do quite that, but we hobbled around the outer edges and watched, and to me it seemed that this crowd was a lot more serious than I'd ever seen any fiesta. The Prof said it wasn't his subject but it was extraordinary how these dance patterns resembled the pictures in the Troyano Codex. He had to explain to me that this Codex thing was one of the few priceless—he had to tie that word to anything old enough to be moldy—one of the priceless picture paintings that the Conquistador priests hadn't gotten hold of and destroyed in their craze to stamp out everything that they called heathen, and it was from the pictures that the *científicos* got what little they knew about pre-Cortez customs.

I guess I still ached from my share of getting smacked around so I could see the dark side of any picture. I reminded the Prof that the traditions mixed up with dance patterns and all the ancient whoopee included a fine finale act of marching some of the guests up a pyramid that was flat-topped to leave room for four strong young priests to hold 'em by their arms and legs over a carved stone with a hollow in it and a channel for the overflow while a fifth gouged out their heart with an obsidian knife. But you couldn't shake his new pep, now that he was out from under the hands of our *paisanos* and just in the hands of some wild, whooping Indians.

NEXT morning, Silver Face showed up and he was polite to us; but in a different way to what he'd been when we were being treated like princes; he talked like we were common folks and friends. He said to explain it to the Prof that he and his people thanked the honored student of the ancient mysteries for having done what little he could to help the Mexicatl Teohuatzin on his way to meet the old gods. More, that he personally thanked the *sabio,* the wise one, for putting him right about the proper position of Venus; for that enabled him to set today as the necessary date for the ceremony. And in spite of Silver Face's new palsy-walsiness, did that word heave my heart up to my back teeth! I had gotten plumb allergic to everything to do with ceremonies. And then, last, Silver Face did a magic and handed me a hope tree full grown and sprouting. He said to tell the Prof that it would be his, Silver Face's, personal loss in his studies of the stars when we went away.

Get that? When we went away! I shoved my elbow to the Prof's ribs as I translated it, and he ouched and said coolly, yes, he'd been counting on that.

I couldn't take his word; I had to verify. I asked Silver Face if he meant we could pack up and start for home without a picket fence of machetes sprouting out of the jungle in front of our faces? He said, yes certainly, as soon as we were recovered from our hurts; because—and he said it as simply and surely as more rain coming or anything else that couldn't be prevented—now there were enough prisoners to satisfy the old gods, who had shown they were mad about something when that doped devotee of the flying cult was killed.

Prisoners to satisfy the gods! I could bet that was an angle the Prof hadn't been counting on. Nor that the reason for all the hurry was that he had done sums to prove to the cult's priests that this was the big day for Venus. Migod, my skin crawled all over to think how close it had come to being that *we* were the only prisoners on hand.

Silver Face left us and went around the crowd giving orders; and it was like the whole weather changed. The dancing came to a sudden end and no argument to it. Most of the crowd collected up their machetes and little gear and went their ways into the jungle. Clear away. They took women and kids with them. All that stayed were those few of them that looked a little bit paler skinned than the rest. The old race, see? This was a private session for the near blonds only; nothing for the mere jungle Indios. We were blond, so that put us on a par and we weren't chased away.

They brought out the new prisoners; the four they'd managed to save alive out of the fight. Hermie was one, and one of my punks and two whose names I didn't know, but one was one who'd kicked me in my face as I lay tied. I wasn't in love with any of them or with their manners; but I nearly puked again to see that *our* old honors were being showered on them. I mean, their hands were tied, of course, but our jewelry, those same jade beads, was hung on them, and some other flat plaque sort of things that looked like New Zealand Maori to me. Four strong-looking men had charge of each one. The little remaining crowd made up a procession and marched slowly around to the other side of the pyramid; the side where the crumbly stone steps were.

My stomach came up to where I could taste it; and that, just from what I was guessing. The Prof wasn't guessing. He knew—he knew everything. He said, "Good God! They are to be given to Xipe!"

I said, "How do you know?" Even I knew that the old gods had caught up with Hermie and the boys, and they weren't going to be as welcome as Hermie had bragged when old Mexicatl had put the curse on him. But, "How d'you know so suddenly it's Xipe?" I asked the Prof.

"I know." That was all he'd say and he seemed so awful sure that I had another qualm. "You mean," I said, "this damned cult we've been wondering about is an ancient hang-over of sure 'nough Xipe the Skinless One and they're going to . . . ?" I couldn't put it to words. I knew, like I'd told the Prof, that Xipe liked his meat peeled. But, hell's blazes, that was all a long time ago. It couldn't be happening here. Not now—even though it hadn't been so long ago that our own Indians had done some pretty hideous stuff to the old pioneers.

But the Prof, for once, handed me a bouquet. He said, "Yes, your pessimism was too correct."

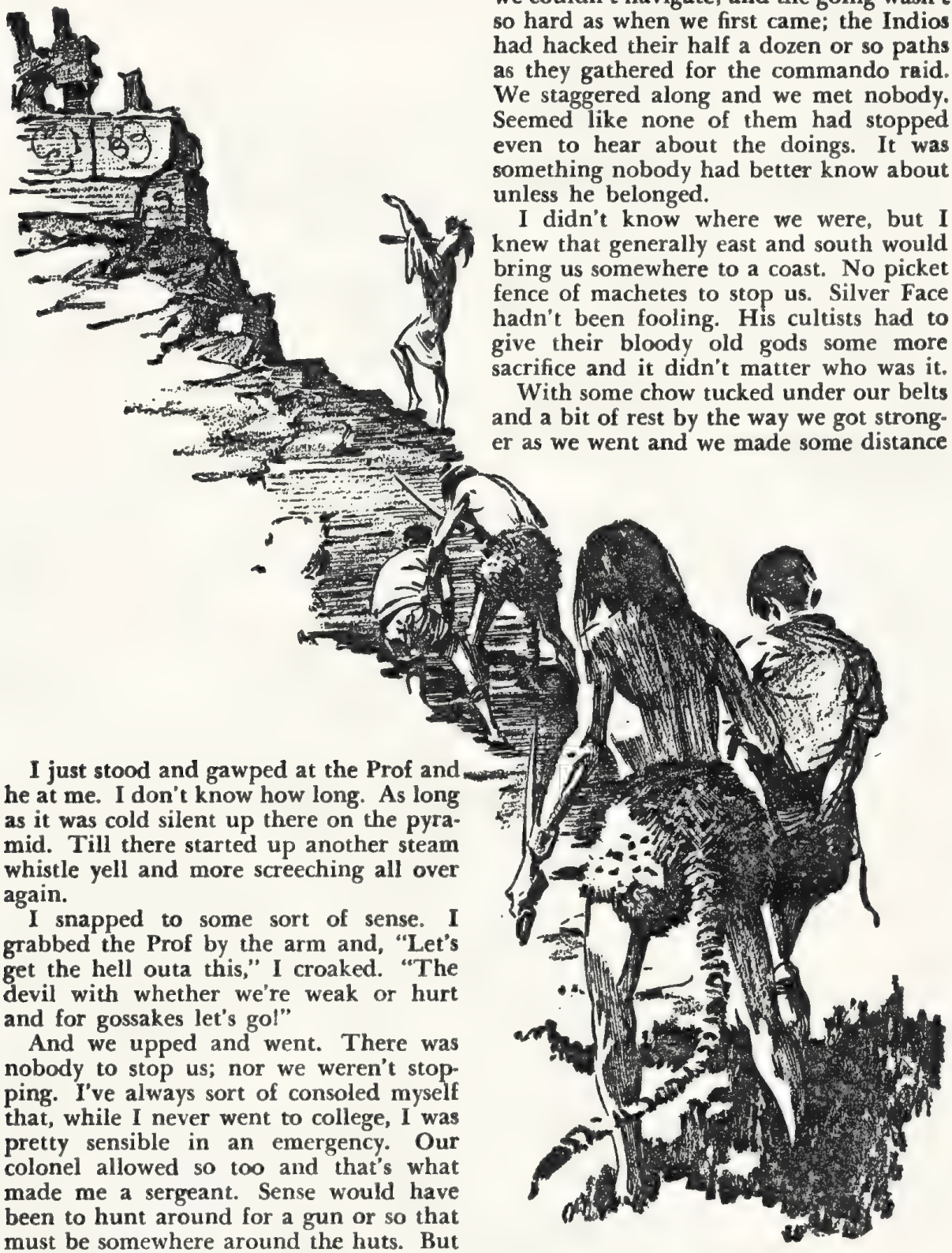
The little procession wound on around the pyramid and we were alone. The Prof licked his tongue around his lips and swallowed dry. "Thank God," he said. "Whatever they may have deserved, thank God they looked to be doped with the *caapi*, don't you think?"

From around the pyramid we heard a moaning sort of chanting. It went on for a long time; and then it began to come from higher, over the pyramid top. The chanting stopped at the top. Everything stopped—waiting.

And then suddenly the yelling began! The most awful screeching you ever heard in a bad dream. I thought it was Hermie's voice. It kept on for a long time; hoarse and then high-pitched.

Did you ever skin just one little half inch of your knuckle?

FOR an awful long time the screeching went on. And then suddenly it quit and there was a chorus of shouting. It came fainter than the screeching and it sounded like "Xipe! Xipe Teotl!"



I just stood and gawped at the Prof and he at me. I don't know how long. As long as it was cold silent up there on the pyramid. Till there started up another steam whistle yell and more screeching all over again.

I snapped to some sort of sense. I grabbed the Prof by the arm and, "Let's get the hell outa this," I croaked. "The devil with whether we're weak or hurt and for gossakes let's go!"

And we upped and went. There was nobody to stop us; nor we weren't stopping. I've always sort of consoled myself that, while I never went to college, I was pretty sensible in an emergency. Our colonel allowed so too and that's what made me a sergeant. Sense would have been to hunt around for a gun or so that must be somewhere around the huts. But we weren't dawdling away time; we made for the jungle. Though I did have a thought to duck into a couple huts as we ran and pick up a machete and a banana leaf bundle that was grub.

We weren't so groggy on our feet that we couldn't navigate; and the going wasn't so hard as when we first came; the Indios had hacked their half a dozen or so paths as they gathered for the commando raid. We staggered along and we met nobody. Seemed like none of them had stopped even to hear about the doings. It was something nobody had better know about unless he belonged.

I didn't know where we were, but I knew that generally east and south would bring us somewhere to a coast. No picket fence of machetes to stop us. Silver Face hadn't been fooling. His cultists had to give their bloody old gods some more sacrifice and it didn't matter who was it.

With some chow tucked under our belts and a bit of rest by the way we got stronger as we went and we made some distance

The little procession marched slowly around to the other side of the pyramid, where the crumbly stone steps were.

before night caught us. But it was easy enough to make a wickiup and crawl in; and if the jungle had been packed with varmints two to the square foot I'd have slept like dead.

Even I felt pretty cheerful with morning. That thing behind us was enough like a bad dream to be hazy in my waking mind; but I've dreamed it all over again plenty since. The Prof was the miracle. He was plumb slap-happy. Almost his old self. Cocky, I mean.

He said, "I could almost wish my subject had been early race migrations. A fascinating study. I must get in touch with this Churchward and discuss our findings that perhaps tend to substantiate his Lemurian theory; because those plaques were certainly Polynesian."

He couldn't fool me. I told him, "Don't camouflage with that baloney. I've been with you too long. That's not what you're so chipper about. What is it?"

And then he threw a scare into me worse than at any time we were being treated like fattened princes. He showed it to me. He fished out of his pocket a gruesome-looking gold mask; a thing about as big as his hand. A marvelous job of gold-smithy it was, certainly done by no savage with a stone chisel. It was Art. I don't know how the guy had done it, but the face looked like—like, migod, it hadn't any skin!

The Prof gloated over the beastly thing. He loved it. "Priceless," he said. "Beyond calculation, as the only specimen extant. It is Xipe the Skinless One."

"Where'd you get it?" I yelled; and I knew before he told me. I said before that an archaeologist would rob his sainted dying grandmother.

"The old priest had it," he said. "Mexicatl Teohuatzin. He wore it over his chest."

I couldn't tell him what I thought. I was having chills and a hemorrhage. But he could read it in my face.

"He gave it to me," he swore. "I felt it there and just before he died he bequeathed it to me."

"Like hell he did!" I choked through my closed throat. "In ancient Maya lingo, I suppose. But I'm not giving a hoot about *how* you got it. The hell is you've *got* it. You blasted fool, it's their sacred high priest's badge of office and they'll be after it on our trail like bloodhounds trained to catch their slaves dead. It's dynamite, you idiot! Throw it away. Up and let's get running."

For once he wasn't superior. He put up no argument about being told what a certified fool he was.

But he wouldn't throw it away. You might as well try to take away a virgin bone from a werewolf as an antique from an archaeologist. He clung to it. He insisted, "They won't follow us; they'll think the gang got it while they had the old man a prisoner. They will be searching in the huts and places; and what is more, they will be in a hurry to hide in the deep jungles after what they have done. And—Mexicatl gave it to me."

I DIDN'T argue, or even listen. I took a hold of him and dragged. I shoved. Down hill the trail went, down precipices. I just about beat him to keep him going and he came nearer to dying than ever under the gang's roughing-up tortures.

But damn if he wasn't right again. Nobody came after us. Or if they did, not till after we'd made the coast and got a fisherman's boat. The guy stared at us like we were ghosts and he told us we'd come out in Guatemala.

And so we got away.

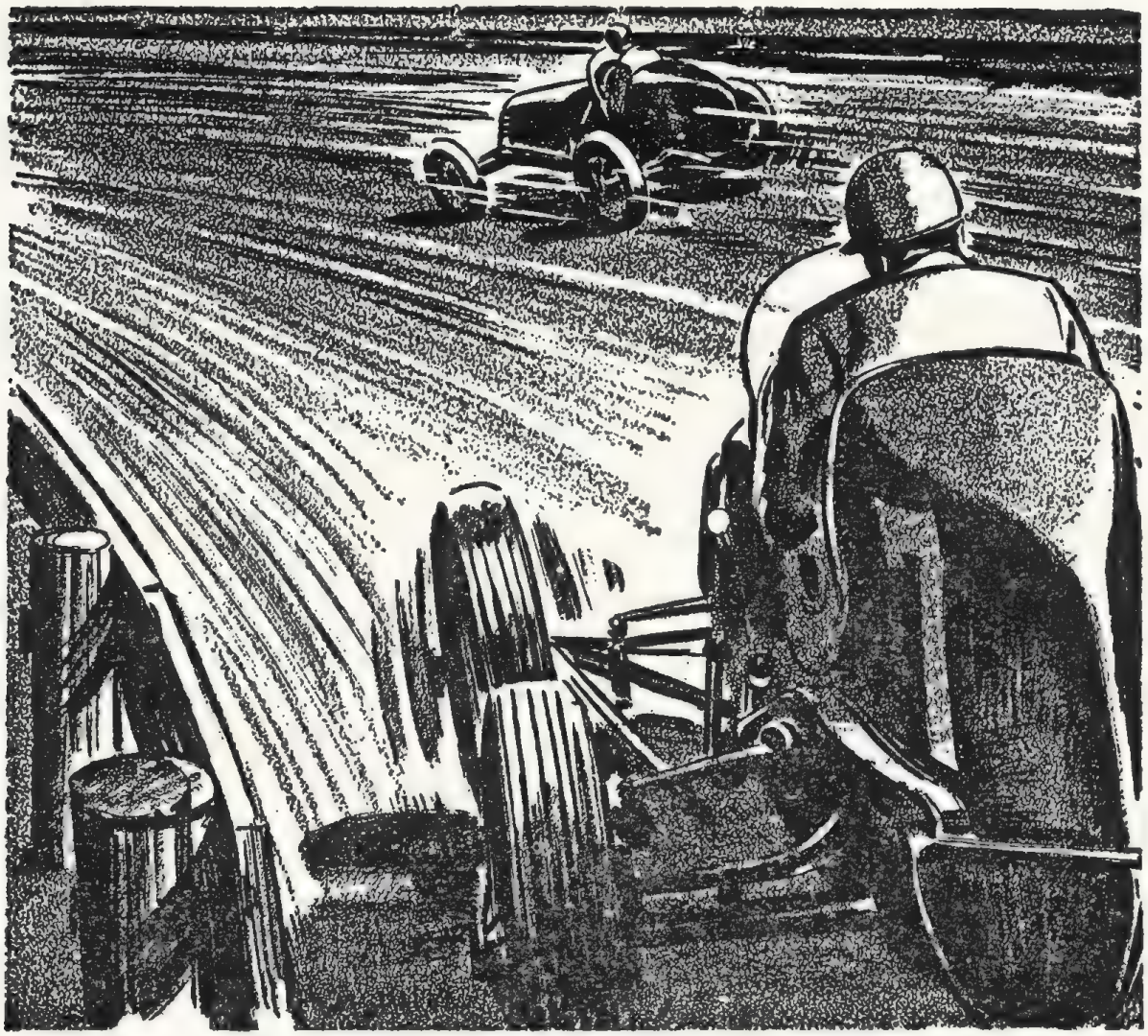
Not that the Prof got away with his loot. I'd already told him he couldn't swipe ancient treasures out from under the Mexican Government, and Customs caught him.

And if you think this all a yarn I'll tell you what became of the "priceless treasure." It's in the *Museo de Antiguedades* in Oaxaca at this minute. In the room with the treasures from the ancient pyramid tombs of Monte Alban, the latest they've found, and so old that the *científicos* can't guess. In a case all by itself. Priceless. A guard watching it. But the mask isn't labeled from Monte Alban. It's just labeled: *XIPE THE SKINLESS.*

I've got no sympathy with the Prof. He got away from Xipe with his skin and he was lucky. And quite mad. He wants me to go with him to some caves I told him about where there's some idols and broken pots that the grave robbers haven't scratched up yet. Me? Ha! What I want is the peaceful life of an oil driller.

FULL THROTTLE

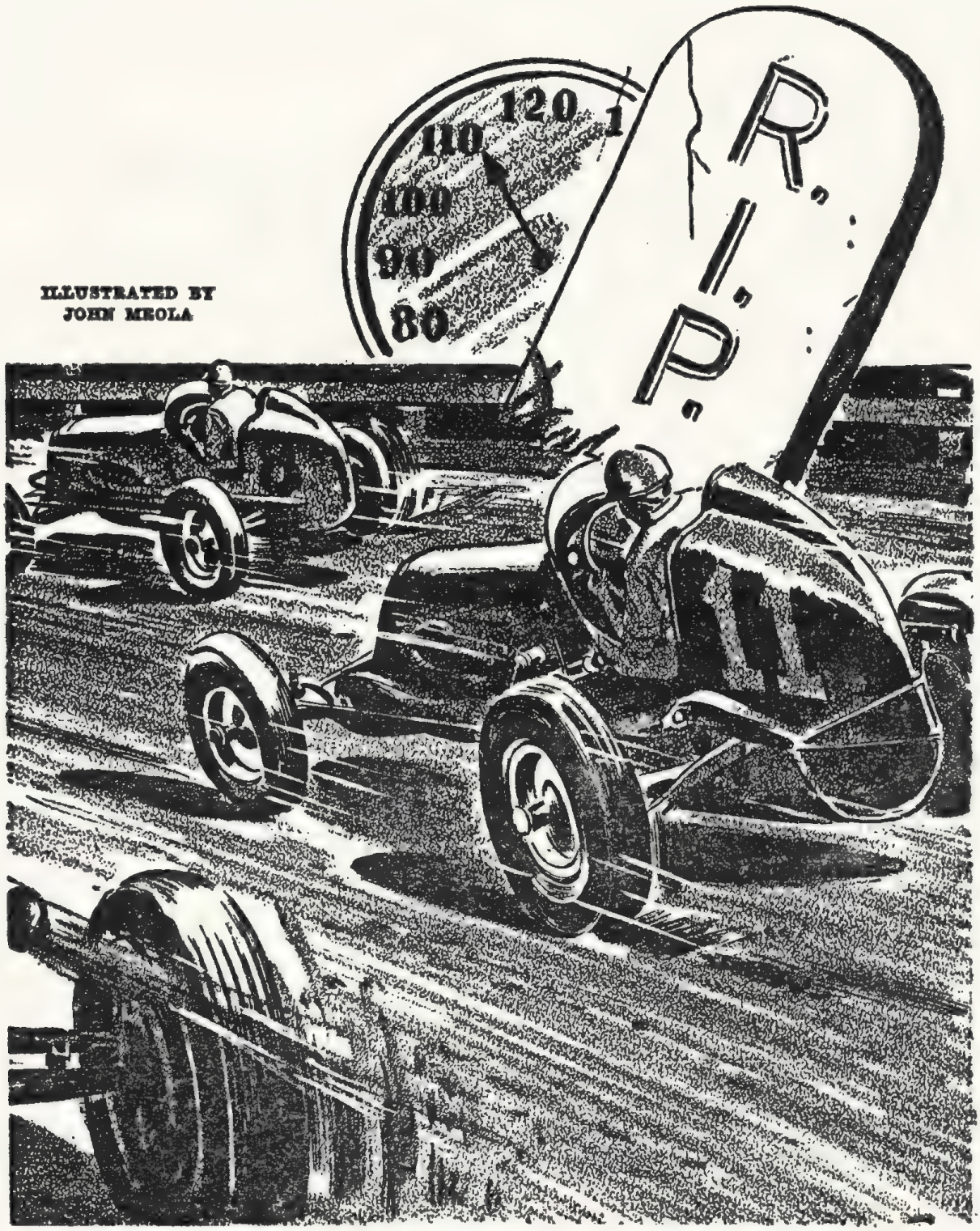
By
COLEMAN MEYER



Four's engine was a screaming, rocketing madhouse and I knew he was in the red sector all the way around!

I'VE always maintained that a guy should stick to his own business; if he's a burglar and successful enough in his profession to stay outside, he should stick to burgling. But no—he'll spend ten minutes at a revival session, head for the river to throw away his implements, get pinched

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN MEOLA



for walking on the park lawn and then get thirty years for the possession of burglar tools!

By the same token, if he's an auto racing driver he should stick to driving races and risk nothing worse than rapid extinction. But no—he'll try his hand at other things, such as playing Cupid and wind up as trailer to an eightball. Maybe, if I had been smart enough to take my own advice . . .

Anyhow—I wasn't thinking of that now. I was looking and had been looking for seventy-eight seconds. And, in those two-

and-a-fraction revolutions of the stop-watch, I knew I had just what the doctor ordered.

Where the kid was from, I didn't know. In fact, as I thought of it now, I didn't even know his name. But incidents of geography and christening were unimportant. All I knew was that my white Miller was getting a good ride.

I walked out on the front straightaway of the hard-surfaced Oakland mile, crossed my arms, bower fashion, over my head and then drew a slicing finger across my throat.

The streaming notes from the chrome stack of my Number Four kept up in the higher numbers for a moment, then slacked off with that bubbling sound that all good engines have. It sluffed to an easy, heat-dropping pace on the back stretch and I nodded approvingly to myself—clever boys that feel for good engines bring them down that way. Amateurs get off the gun in a hurry and curl valves up like potato chips.

The Miller bumped across the uneven pit surface, turned for her stall and the mill sliced off with that bump that is characteristic of twelve-to-one compression. The unsmiling face of the kid, pebbled from the semi-macadam tossed by the unfendered front wheels, looked through the cockpit once. Then his long form hoisted itself out.

I go nearly two hundred and have five feet eleven to pack it. He lacked perhaps thirty pounds of the weight but I had to raise my eyes an inch to peer into his. He stood there, peeling off the yellow pigskin gloves with the sewn powder-puff on the back. His gray eyes met mine levelly although for some inexplicable reason, there seemed to be a hint of challenge there, as though he was preparing to take issue with any word that might be spoken. He said nothing.

"Pretty fair ride," I offered grudgingly, just before the silence became embarrassingly acute. It doesn't pay to become too excited over a prospect, as it raises the percentage. Then, as he still remained silent, I added, "What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say," he replied coldly.

I thought that one over for a moment. Tommy Hawkins had brought him over a few minutes ago and said that maybe he'd fit the wheel of Four. Four isn't exactly a Miller. The fact that she started out that way is maybe an index to her age but keeping up with the Joneses had mixed her pedigree up with Winfield and Offenhouser and about everything else that keeps urge in an engine. She was clean and straight and freshly painted now. Knocking thirty feet out of the fence at San José had wrinkled both of us considerably but Four's metal work came back quicker than my broken shoulder, which was why I needed a driver.

I could get boys by the squad but to get a boy, for a temporary seat, was something else. Everybody knew it was a seat for only a month or so until I got in shape, and good boys steered clear of giving up even a fair iron, although Four was as good as race cars come. I could use this boy.

I'm Dutch-Irish and the Dutch usually arches my back on small provocation. "Hell—we won't get far that way. If you're looking for a car perhaps we can get together."

He waited for a moment and then apparently decided that his name wasn't a state secret. "My name's Bennett—Dave Bennett," he said ungraciously.

"You do pretty well. Where have you been running?"

The gray eyes studied me impersonally.

"So—it's that way," I shrugged. "O.K. If you want to be a Silent Sam, that's up to you. I don't give a damn if you're out on parole. I need a driver—not a companion. You're clean with the stewards? You can get a card?"

He nodded, produced a package of cigarettes from the upper pocket of the once-white coveralls. His long fingers fished one from the package and mentally I nodded approval again. Good men with a feel for engines have fingers like that; thick, stubby ones bend cars into old iron before their time.

"Roger," I said. "Sixty-forty. I pay all but your personal expenses. No contract—no agreement. You quit—I fire, any time. O.K.?"

"O.K.," he said.

I ASKED little Tommy Hawkins about him that night at the hotel.

"Hell, I don't remember, Clayt," he answered. He ran brown fingers

across his scarred face. "I've got a lousy memory for names but I do pretty well on faces. He just wandered over to my stall and asked if any cars were open. I knew I'd seen him somewhere before and it must have been around a racetrack so I took a chance that he might be the boy for you. What're you worrying about anyhow? He gave your boiler quite a ride."

"I know. That isn't what's bothering me. It's the Two Hundred Miler next month. There's a lot of dough up and I may not be in shape to herd Four. I'd just like to know where I stand in case I have to let him drive."

Tommy dismissed it with a yawn. "I hear Ed Vetter's coming out," he said.

"He won't be the only one," I agreed. "They're going to empty out the east for that one. It's too much money for some of those eastern hot-shots to pass up. That's why I'd like to know a little more about this kid."

"Aw, what the hell." Tommy stretched elaborately. "Quit worrying. You're not marrying the guy."

I thought that maybe I was getting ahead of myself at that. Sunday we ran at Santa Rosa. Bennett kept to himself during the week. In fact I didn't get to see him at all until Saturday when he came into the pits and handed me a receipted hotel bill without a hello, good-bye or anything; just put a handbag down on the pit rail, pulled out a pair of overalls, helmet and goggles and got into his gear.

The Dutch stiffened my back. I matched his silence with silence, jerked a finger at the cockpit, nodded an O.K. and we had him on his way without a word being spoken.

The kid was all business. And he knew his business. I had purposely left the small tires on the rear. In two laps he pulled back into the pit stall, lifted his goggles with a gloved hand and shook his white crash helmet. "Got any other rubber? This strip has too much top cushion for these small hoops."

My brief nod was his reply and I beckoned Don Everest who was helping me to throw the jack under. But I couldn't help grinning to myself as we changed the shoes to wide tread and he went out just about the time Tommy came by. They ran together for a couple of miles and put on a pretty fair show.

I had to grin a little to myself. Tommy, Bull Jensen and I have been racing together for a good many years now. And I know when they're *going*. Tommy was. He had the pole and I saw his head turn when the kid came alongside. Then I watched him do some of that sweet cornering, his cream-and-red Number Three slashing down the stretch out of a high run, blip for just a moment before the turn, just enough to pick up some axle slack and then the obedient cock of the rear deck as full throttle and nearly a couple of hundred horsepower hit his rubber.

Bennett never lost an inch. Four stayed glued to the outer slot, just far enough ahead to let the spuming dirt fly clear and he rode with Tommy for about ten miles.

That was enough and I gave him the "Come in!" wave. Four bubbled into the pit after the next lap. The kid sat there for a moment. I walked over. "Didn't want to lick the engine too hard," he said briefly. "Unless you want that guy taken care of. . ."

I restrained the frank amazement from my eyes but couldn't stifle a chuckle of amusement. There weren't too many who could say that about Tommy Hawkins.

BENNETT didn't win Sunday. I didn't expect him to. Bull has driven a thousand miles of competition on Santa Rosa and the soft stuff is just made for his football shoulders. The kid did get third, though, and it probably would have been second if my irritation hadn't gotten the better of my common sense.

We went through the same deaf mute act Sunday and the only word spoken was when I started to brief him. He stopped me thirty seconds into the speech.

"Only one of us can drive this car," he said stiffly. "I've been on a track before."

The Dutch flared up and I shrugged my shoulders. If it had to be the hard way it had to be the hard way. I wandered over to Tommy's pit and, after a few minutes of gossip, casually mentioned yesterday. Tommy said: "So. . ." And that cost us second place.

It was a hell of a scrap though.

By the time we got to the Goshen half-mile next Sunday I was really running a high head temperature. Bennett won the time trials in a blistering 28.2 that tore up

the track and nearly tore down the fence. Then he dogged Bill for forty laps that paid off when Bull overslid. He was in the hole in a flash and used enough of the track to stay there until the flag dropped.

Bull was first in and grinned at me ruefully. I was so tickled that I unbent a little when Four came bumping across the pit. "Nice going, son," I said.

He looked up at me from under his white crash helmet. For just a moment he fussed in the cockpit and, while I wasn't sure, it looked as though he kind of patted Four's steering column. Then I'm damned if he didn't hoist his rangy form out and walk away without a word.

I didn't get to see him again that night in the hotel when I paid him off. He accepted his end of the purse, stuffed it carelessly in his pocket, and said, "I'll be at Hanford next Saturday," and stalked away.

And I didn't see him until next week. I didn't notice him particularly when he did come into the pits. My attention, like that of everybody else in the area, was fastened on the huge truck that came jolting in. It was led by a long, black convertible. Tommy murmured in my ear, "All we need is a band!" Huge red letters on the side of the truck said: *Ed Vetter.*

They pulled into the empty stall next to mine and I looked him over with frank curiosity as the driver of the convertible stood up on the running board to survey the track—a big, powerfully-shouldered guy, dark-haired and dark-featured. And, for no good reason, I decided I didn't like him. He had a nasty curl to his lips.

There was a swift intake of breath beside me. I turned to see Bennett—even after these weeks I couldn't think of him as Dave—standing there, his gaze riveted on Vetter. I guess there is something in telepathy; Vetter's glance was on the far side of the track. Abruptly, as though a command had been given, it swung to Bennett.

He stepped from the running board and came to the low rail that marks off the stall size. "So—you're here, Sonny Boy," he sneered. "The socket wrench wonder!

"Come west to make your fortune?" Vetter jibed in that voice that matched the curl in his lips. "The gaslight circuit." Then his laugh echoed nastily and he turned back toward his crew who were unloading his car from the huge truck.

Bennett spun on his heel and walked over to Four. I followed after a few moments. He was sitting in the car, his mouth a thin straight line. I started to say something but one look at his bleak features stifled my impulse to be human. "Better get going," I said coldly.

I knew something was wrong in the first corner after the warm-up laps. His easy assurance, that arrow-straight lancing for the corners was gone. In the place of long, swooping slides was a jerking, engine-squalling skidding. I didn't bother him and he was still out there when Vetter's Number One, a flaming crimson job with that peculiar three-quarter wheelbase from the southeastern circuit, caught him.

Vetter's reputation is a heavy one. You won't find him on an Indianapolis program anywhere—that's for the polo-shirt boys anyhow. But down among the guys who haven't any time for the bricks, the real dirt-track men, he drew plenty of water—in the east.

Vetter rode with the kid on the outside for a fair corner, dropped back on the back stretch and then, driving almost carelessly, slashed down on the pole and threw half the track into Four's cockpit!

That was only the beginning. For the next ten miles Four suffered almost every indignity a good race car can be subjected to. Vetter was under Bennett, outside of him, in fact everywhere but over him. And the kid didn't look as good as a tow car man in a warm-up lap!

I let it go for another five, then hung up the "In!" sign. No words were spoken when Four jounced in. I made a signal to cut the mill, and walked away.

BENNETT was in the hotel bar when I got there that evening. His long slender fingers were holding a glass into which he stared moodily.

I took the leather-covered stool alongside him, ordered bourbon and plain water and sat there, staring at the back-bar mirror. I was almost down to the ice cube when he suddenly turned and blurted, "I'm sorry, Mr. Tinsley, sorry as hell!" Maybe it was the lights but for a moment it seemed as though there was a suspicion of moisture in his eyes.

You can't repair three weeks with seven words. "Sorry for what?" I said coolly.

"Everything," he replied miserably. "I've made an awful mess of things."

"Come on. Give."

"I—I used to work for Vetter." His words fairly rushed forth. "I'm a pretty fair mechanic on hot iron and he had about the hottest."

"From what I've seen you were working for a heel."

His dark head nodded. "So I found out. I didn't want to work on them, I wanted to drive. He promised me a car and I put in two full seasons working for marbles just to be in line for one. Then I found out he was making a big joke of it throughout the circuit. Everybody knew it but me."

"So. . . ?"

"Well—there was a girl."

From my vantage point of bachelorhood I nodded sagely. "There's always a girl," I murmured.

"Oh, this one was different," he said defensively. His voice was momentarily enthusiastic and, for the first time since we had met, he smiled. It was almost a shock to find that he had nice even teeth and that the facial gesture turned him from a sullen kid into a nice-looking, boyish youngster. "She worked for Pop Curry, the promoter who ran the fair circuit. We went around together for a while—I mean we were—"

"I know."

"Well—all of a sudden Vetter noticed her. I guess she was flattered or something. He's a pretty big shot in this business. So I just sort of faded out of the picture."

I nodded to myself. I could just picture the stiff-necked pride of the youth who sat alongside me.

His finger jerked in the general direction of the race track. "I've driven Vetter's Number One a thousand miles, I guess. He never got to the track until late and I got a lot of experience in the early morning hours. So I should have gotten smart when he asked me if I wanted to drive the main event on a Sunday. It was after he had qualified the car and anyhow, he never missed a trick in riding me in front of people. Then he arranged a big build-up for me over the public address system.

"I knew something was wrong the mo-

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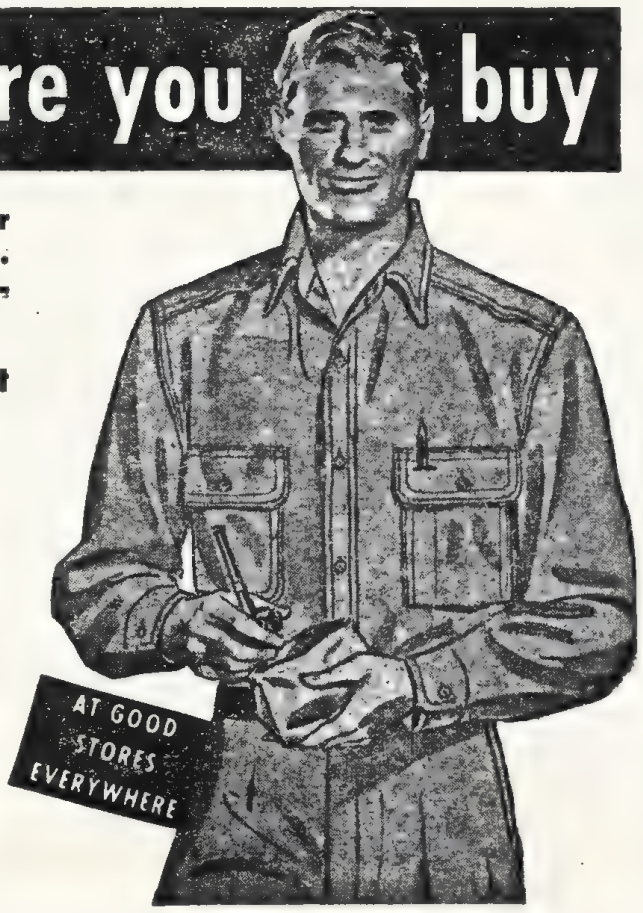

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ment the engine hit after the tow-off. And I got last place. Even a car from Class "B" beat me. I didn't have enough power to hold it in a slide and I guess I looked pretty bad." He sipped at his drink. "Then, when I came in, he gave me the works; said I couldn't even drive a tow car for him. I didn't know until two weeks later that he'd changed the jets in One. There wasn't enough fuel going through to run an Austin."

He clasped his slender fingers. "Nobody would even give me a chance after that," he continued gloomily. "That's why I came out here, thinking I might promote a car somewhere. And that's why I kept my mouth shut; I didn't want to lie any more than I had to. My performance had to talk for me as I couldn't answer any questions about my previous experience. I guess you think I'm an awful heel."

I disregarded his last sentence. "How about the girl?"

"I don't know," he flushed. "I haven't heard of her since I left. Guess I'd better not drive Four again," he said wistfully.

"No?"

"It's too good a car to get anything but the best ride, Mr. Tinsley," he replied earnestly. "Vetter does something to me on a race track. I can't think or act logically when he's around."

I pursed my lisp at that. "Mmm," I said slowly. "No—I guess not. I'll herd it Sunday."

His face had a stricken look. "Can I—I mean—"

"Yeah, you'll be in the pit."

I was beginning to get some ideas.

IT WAS a scramble with everything but meat-axes Sunday. Vetter certainly knew his way around, but Bull, Tommy and myself were not exactly wearing our first long pants. It took the three of us to do it and even so he nudged Tommy out of third place.

By the time we got to Oakland for the Two Hundred, Dave and I were functioning like a pretty smooth team. Now that he'd unburdened himself he proved that his claim of "fair mechanic" was a masterpiece of understatement. He knew hot engines and he gave Four everything within the confines of his knowledge, with that touch that goes beyond mere valves and pistons and gets close to a labor of love.

"Anyhow—if I can't drive her I'll know she's getting a good ride," he said wistfully as we buttoned up the work on Friday night.

My shoulder was in fair shape. Whether it would go two hundred miles was something else. But I had made a couple of phone calls east and, in the back of my mind, had no intention of being forced to prove it.

Saturday Dave ground Four around for a hundred laps at a mile-a-minute loaf and came in with, "Any time you're ready, Mr. Tinsley. She feels like she's ready to tear the rubber off."

I said, "O.K." and rolled out. On the other side of the oval was Vetter's crimson Number One. He caught me in ten miles, tucked in alongside and looked me over with his sneering grin. I rolled with him for half a dozen laps and then, when he started to bear down on it, left him and came back to the pit. Personally a showdown would have appealed to me but I had other ideas.

I qualified Four the next morning and it was a good enough ride to get me in the second row but it was Vetter's crimson car that was on the pole in the front row. It took a 38.2 lap to do it and he had his wheels right between the fence and a tombstone in making it. Bull had the outside while Tommy was along side of me in the second row. Twelve more irons made up the parallel lines that snuffled and jerked as the starter's flag said: "Roll 'em!"

Dave gave me the clasped hands over his head and I nodded in acknowledgement. Then I felt in the pocket of my coveralls just to make sure it was there.

The start was an orderly affair—the driving run down the backstretch, then that familiar, swelling thunder that was sixteen separate engines merging, as the half-turn point was passed, into a composite roar of about 3200 horsepower, a thunder that rose and swelled and shook the stands and then climaxed in a brazen shriek of unleashed mechanical frenzy as the green flag dropped.

The butterflies left my stomach and I settled down to the business of driving a two-hundred-mile race-meet. Vetter set the mark at about 40 seconds flat; I gave him five lengths, looked rearward to see Bull just outside of me and Tommy five more

to the rear. It was routine after a few laps; tachometer on the green sector through the turn, a nudge into the red for a bit of the straightaway, a blip to pick up some axle slack just before the turn and then a snap to get the rear hoops spinning.

The heat wouldn't come in until the second hundred so we ground off the miles without change of position. 25 . . . 50 . . . 75. I nodded my head in acknowledgment of the pit boards that Dave held up. The plan was fuel at a hundred and, at the 98 board, I saw him getting ready on the track side of the pit rail.

Vetter went in at 99. I took the lead. He was out in forty seconds. Then Bull and Tommy went in. A board came up with a big "G?" at 102. I shook my head. Bull and Tommy were back out and Vetter came boring by. He was up in the higher numbers now. I wanted him up there so I let him go.

My pit was going frantic and bewildered boards kept coming up. It was 125 before I saw Vetter's crimson nose behind me. He was blasting down the straightaway and really driving now. I used a little more gun, just enough to hold him alongside me, had the tach edging the red all the way around now. The speed rose steadily. Still not out of bounds, but fast.

I tried him on the backstretch as we smoked out of the corner even. Gun for gun! Both engines pegged! The red nose stayed there for a moment. Then it slid steadly out of my vision. That's all I wanted to know. I backed off instantly and my lifting foot brought him right back into focus.

A blistering turn. Howling rubber! Screaming, screeching engine! I reined it in just a hair. Vetter was outside. Instantly he pulled ahead. Half a length. A length. I dropped in pace coming up the home stretch, my nose buried right up against Number One's sleek, crimson tail.

We shrieked up the stretch. Farther. Farther. Then I felt his engine break and he unpegged it for the corner. I left Four on for just an instant longer, tapped the release on the safety belt. The spreader bar between the springs of Four just touched the crimson tail. I lunged forward and up, half out of the seat, could even hear the "Ahhh!" from the grandstands. Then I hit the brake. Vetter vanished like a rocket.

It was a fast apron run. I pulled into the pit, made my face into an expression of pain. Dave's features were white as he came running over. "My God! I thought it was going to toss you out!"

"Four's all finished!" I was hoisting myself out as I spoke. "My shoulder—something cracked. The belt was loose and I hit the cowl."

"Finished hell!" Dave was racing for the rail. I grinned a little to myself, whirled to help Everest dump fuel. Dave came dashing back, buckling on his helmet. His face was grim and determined.

I reached in my upper coverall pocket. "Here—I forgot this before. A telegram."

His hands tore it in half in his haste and he was reading the pieces as he settled himself in the cockpit. A beatific smile started over his face. "Mr. Tinsley—Clayt! It's a wire! From Evelyn! Evelyn! That's the girl—"

"Get going" I roared. We push-started as he shouted, "Here. Read it! It's—" His voice was lost in the snarl of Four's engine and the two pieces of yellow paper fluttered back at me.

THERE was nothing uncertain about the next corner. Four had the heat up, went through the upper turn right against the pin. He never lifted his foot down the backstretch and my white Miller was a slashing white line by the time he hit the lower turn. The corner was a masterpiece; just a blip going in and then he rapped it right to the floor and reeled in the slack.

I made a hasty survey of the lap boards. Vetter, Bull and Tommy had him nearly sixty seconds in the hole. The rest didn't count. There were seventy laps to go. I marked up the pit board with a big "60" and hung it up as he sizzled by. His head nodded, teeth showing as he grinned.

The watch gave him 38.3 for the next lap! Four's engine was a screaming, rocketing madhouse and I knew he was in the red sector all the way around! He caught Bull and Tommy and then Vetter in twenty laps. I saw them all start when he came by, then caught their study of the lap board and you could almost sense the mental calculation. Vetter spurted for just an instant. I guess it was while he was figuring. Then he settled down as he evidently decided that Four couldn't make it.

The stands were on their feet now as the white Miller slashed by car after car. At 170 he was on the opposite side of the track from the leading trio and about twenty second in the hole. Pit boards started up from Vetter's pit.

I held my fingers crossed. If he stayed right side up and if Four's engine didn't blow . . .

Corner after corner—vicious, wrenching turns that had Four dancing and shuddering as Dave kept her broadside and only a whisper away from a spin! 180 and he was just going into the turn as they were coming out! 185 and he pulled up on Tommy!

He was lucky. He caught Tommy out of a slashing run on the high side, right in the center of a turn. Bull was ahead and Tommy couldn't use any more apron speed. Bennett was in on top of him before Tommy could widen his corner and close up the hole.

Dave hurtled down, chopped Tommy off close and forced him to shut off. Then he swung wide on the front straightaway and rode it with Bull. Vetter was only five lengths ahead and I saw his crimson helmet turn as his pit pointed frantically behind.

The grandstand was screaming for Four now. Bull's big shoulders squared and I knew the kid was in for a bad time. I wasn't wrong. Bull's been racing fifteen years and what he doesn't know—isn't. He was flat on the apron in a long, controlled slide. Bennett tried it on the outside. Bull used a little more of the track.

Instantly the kid was off the gun and tucked in behind Bull. 186-187! His chrome nose was latched right to Bull's tail! Sometimes I thought it was touching. They pulled up a length on Vetter. 188! The nose was still there. I snapped the watch as they went by—wouldn't believe reading it gave. 189!

Suddenly it paid off!

Up the front stretch, a blasting, frenzied ride. I almost shouted to Bull to back it off! He left it floored. His big cream job wrenched once going into the turn. Then the front end slid out with the back end!

Four was through the hole like a rocket! Low in the slot, front end see-sawing daintily back and forth as Bennett held it pointed with gentle fingers and a prayer!

It was just too fast and I groaned as the front end, just failing in traction by the merest thread, took him wider and wider toward the rail. Maybe it was good. Four painted a broad white stripe of speed through the turn and it carried him up to and almost ahead of Vetter's crimson Number One until the moment to get it pointed for the straightaway called for power off.

The chips were down now! Vetter's car was running the stretch wide open. Dave lost two lengths getting lined up. They streaked down the stretch. I waited for Dave to pull up on him. He didn't gain an inch! Then I groaned. Vetter had suckered me in during that earlier stretch run we had; had saved a little throttle and left me with the impression that Four could clean him on the stretches. And now the kid was a couple of lengths behind and no way to make it up except through cornering!

That's when I found out how smart a kid could get running by himself!

The next eight laps were classical; Vetter's car was a lancing streamliner that rode the track as though on rails and bent the corners with a precision that was superb. And Four was like a coupled tender. Dave used draft on the stretches and it gave him just enough to pull his nose right into Vetter's tail without giving him enough to pull on by, once he got out in the breeze.

He never let up an instant. Vetter's tail would slide out as he crossed it up for the turn; Four's nose would poke right in there, chrome grill almost in Vetter's cockpit! I could see Vetter's head turn each time as he'd gauge the distance. Eight laps. Sixteen times the nose sneaked in there. And sixteen times the red helmet turned to gauge the chrome nose that threatened.

Then they were going down the backstretch and coming up for the green flag. Mechanically I saw Vetter's tail swing, his head turn. And suddenly Four leaped toward the outer rail!

I knew what had happened; Vetter had been pinching it down slightly each turn as he had Four pocketed and could choose the pace.

And Dave had been pulling it down even a little more, playing Vetter with a tight line and giving him the impression that Four was cooking out from the ter-

rific pace, had played him down until he had enough gun left to furnish acceleration.

Four's rubber clawed the speedway as he stabbed it to the mat. Both cars were dancing and rear-end light. The white one, high, had the run and foot by foot, the chrome nose pulled ahead. Halfway through the turn I wouldn't have given a nickel for the chance of either car to complete it!

Dave had half a length at the center of the corner. I used body english in the pits. At three quarters the whole hood was ahead. I wasn't waiting for that; I was waiting for the wheels. Then, slashing off the corner, they appeared opposite Vetter's cockpit and I knew he was all finished!

The pinching job was neat, complete and deadly; I saw Dave's hands go high on the wheel as they hit the stretch and ran it fast. Then I watched as he reeled in steadily. The white Miller pinched in toward the apron slowly but inexorably. The red car tried to wedge for a moment. It was no go! The slot by the apron narrowed to nothing and Vetter's engine echoed hollowly. His foot came up.

The rest was just routine for twenty-four seconds. Then the checkered flag dropped.

I WAITED for the kid to make the extra lap. His face was a mask of dirt lightened by the two white ovals where his goggles had rested. There was no crowd in the pit as yet. That would come later, as soon as the tenth car had been flagged off. His teeth were a white line in his darkened features.

He sat in the cockpit for a moment. His hand reached up to run over the smooth white cowl.

I thought of the telegram. It had cost me over forty dollars in phone calls to run down Pop Curry and locate the girl. She had sounded a trifle puzzled but at two dollars a minute I didn't go too deep into things, merely explained that the kid was in a mental spin and needed a lift and she agreed to comply. I read it once again as I passed it over:

JUST FOUND OUT WHERE YOU WERE STOP WHY DIDN'T YOU WRITE STOP ALL MY LOVE EVELYN

He accepted the yellow papers, caressed the cowl once more, said, "We came through together all right, didn't we, Baby?" Then he sighed blissfully, looked at the wire. "That was certainly grand of Miss Carter, wasn't it?"

"Miss Carter?" I echoed stupidly. "I thought you were . . . "

He seemed to color faintly through the pebbled dirt. "Maybe," he said happily, "I was stretching it just a little when I said we were . . . well, you know. You see, we only went out together once and that was only for a milkshake at the track. But she's a grand girl." He sighed. "You've been simply swell to me, Mr. Tinsley. I'll certainly miss you."

"Miss me?" I echoed more stupidly. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, sure," he said blissfully. "I didn't know she felt this way but I'll phone her tonight and I'll be heading east in the morning!"

You see what I mean by a shoemaker sticking to his last?

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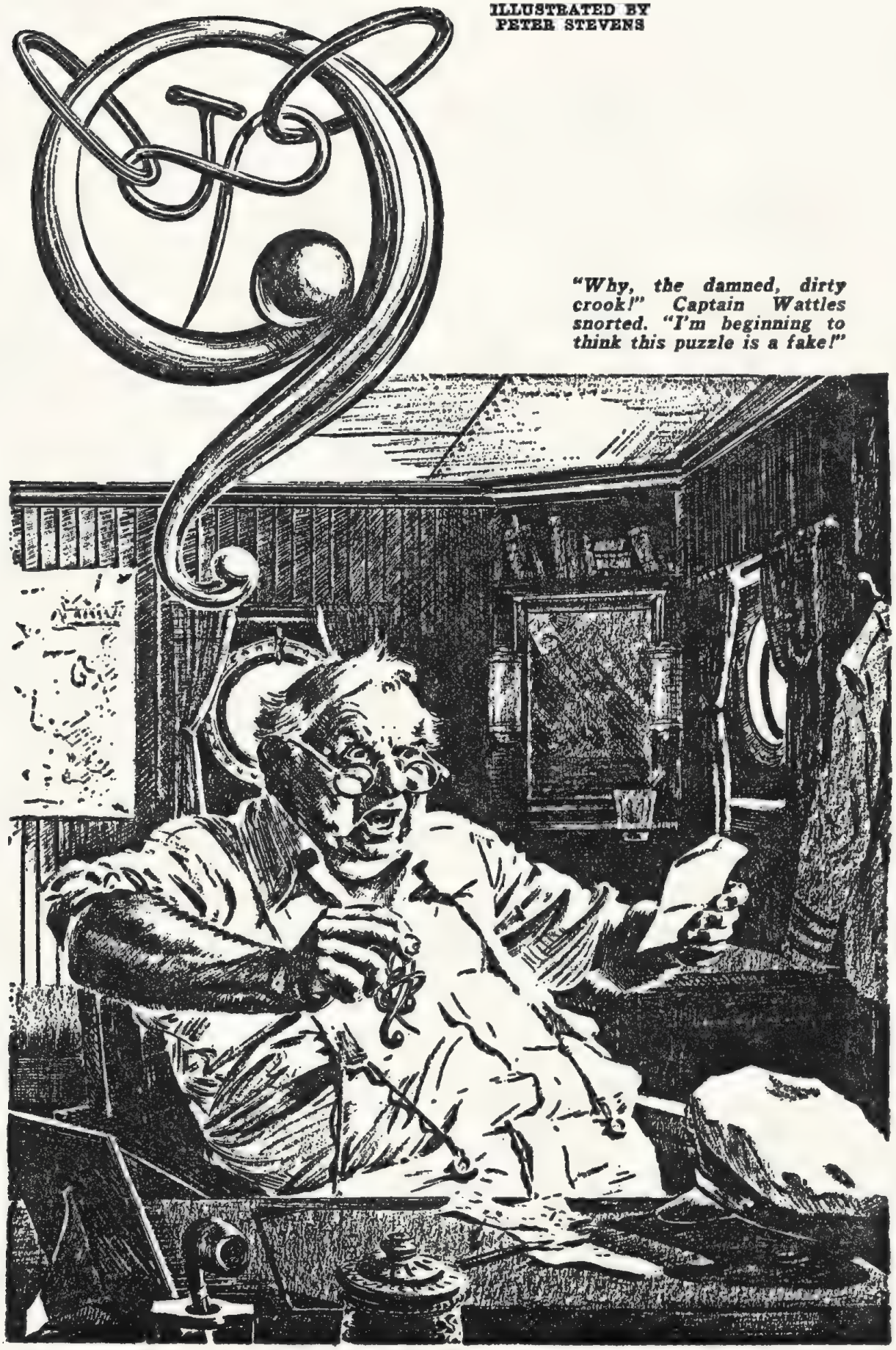
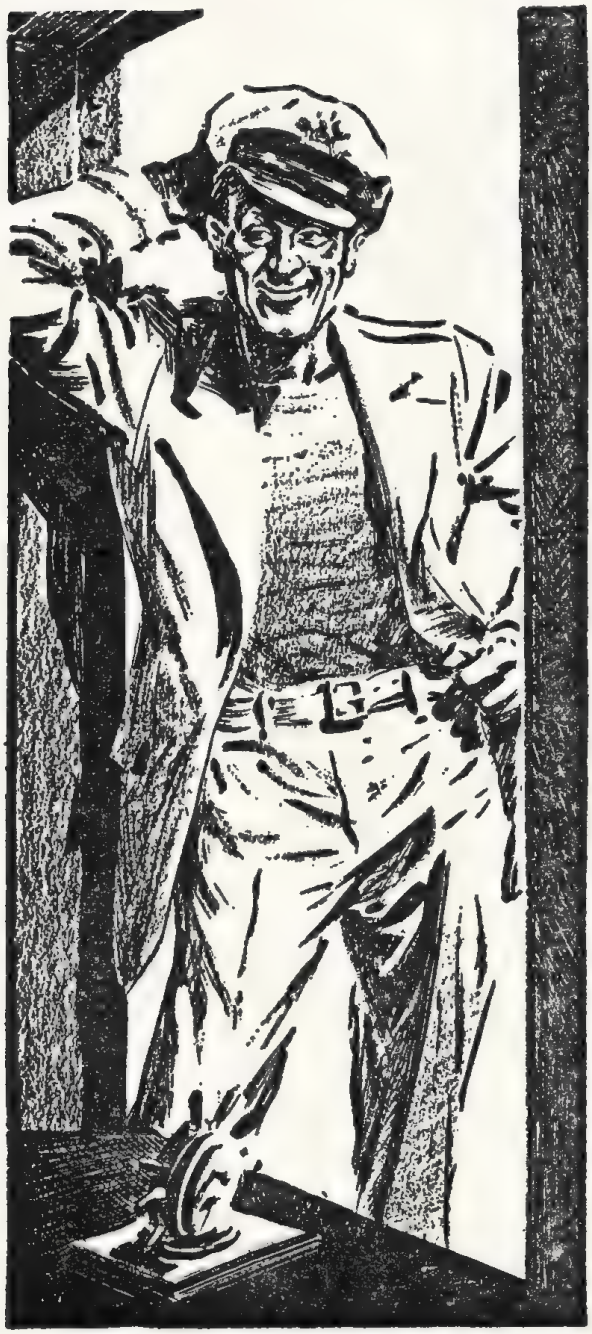


"Why, the damned, dirty crook!" Captain Wattles snorted. "I'm beginning to think this puzzle is a fake!"

SALT WATER DAFFY

By

ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN



THE mate of the freighter *Hyacinth* tapped on the door of the captain's cabin, heard an absent-minded, "Yes, what is it?" and taking off his uniform cap went in.

"I just wanted to say, sir," he began half-humorously, "we've a radio message," and then he sighted and leaned his lank frame against the door jamb. Captain Wattles was in his shirt-sleeves and suspenders, his stocky body planted firmly in his swivel chair, his elbows on his desk and his steel-rimmed spectacles perched on his snub nose while he glared malevolently at a weird tangle of steel rings and bars on the blotter before him. The mate coughed. Captain Wattles lowered a stubby forefinger to poke at the rings and shook his head.

"Generally speaking there's a fundamental rule about these things," he announced. "But this bloody gadget don't act like it."

"Yes, sir," agreed the mate, part of a mate's duty being always to agree. "But I just wanted to tell you . . ."

Captain Wattles waved an impatient hand. "D'you know I sat up half the night trying to figure this out?"

"Yes, sir," agreed the mate again. He fanned himself with his cap and moved a little so he could get some effect from the purring deckhead fan, and brace himself better to the *Hyacinth's* rolling over the lazy tropic sea. "Is that still the one Captain Mosely bet you a hundred bucks and a dinner you couldn't untangle?"

"It is!" snapped the captain and swung around to peer over his glasses. "*You* wanta bet too?"

The mate looked startled. "Not at all, sir. I know you're an expert. I just wanted

to say there was a radio from the *Sanshan*. Mosely wants to know if you're still playing games. He says he'll take that dinner at the Travatore the night he docks behind us."

Captain Wattles blew his nose. "Opinions differ," he said acidly. "I admit this is a tricky job, but if Mosely's telling the truth that it's a legitimate one and can come apart, I'll lick it before I dock. Where's the *Sanshan* now?"

"About a hundred miles southwest of us," stated the mate. "And starting to buck a heavy swell."

The captain grunted and poked at his tangle of rings again. "Well, we've still got a couple of days before port and I ain't buying Mosely no dinner. Now run along and don't bother me . . . Oh, yes, you might tell Mosely to go to hell! Patience is the watchword. I'll fix things!"

The mate shook his head and softly withdrew while Captain Wattles bent to his problem, his red face intent and his little gray eyes filled with the look reserved exclusively for fanatics. Some men collect postage stamps; some match covers; some baggage stickers, horseshoe nails or blondes. Captain Wattles went in for puzzles, the tangible, solid kind, and his cabin was a clutter of trick Chinese boxes (how do you open 'em?) ; contraptions of wire; fantastic mazes of wooden links and balls, and sundry other affairs that simply defied description. But Captain Wattles had mastered them all. Given time, he declared, and patience—patience particularly—there was no puzzle he couldn't fathom. And since a shipmaster at sea has quite some leisure, he had done considerable fathoming. Mosely thought he had him on this one, and Mosely was going to be surprised, the sneering, unmitigated blackguard. Radioing about was he still playing games! The affair was a matter of honor! Captain Wattles poked the rings again.

DOWN below, the mate had dropped into the saloon for coffee and the pantryman who served him was full of questions: "I 'spose 'e's still at it, sir?" he inquired with a jerk of his head. "Ain't got it figured yet. Odd's are down to two to one and the bosun's already started a 'book.' What d'you think?"

"I dunno," sighed the mate, spooning some sugar over. "Maybe I'm sailing on a madhouse. The old man puzzle-drunk and all hands betting one way or the other. This is supposed to be a ship finding cargo somewhere, or I could be mistaken."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, sir," said the pantry man tolerantly. "The old man's got all the crew with him and I dunno as anyone likes Mosely—pardon me, sir, Captain Mosely—and there's a lot of dough involved. Now, I was talking to the second engineer and he thought if the old man didn't have much luck before we hit port —well—seeing the bet's just good until we dock—er—things can happen to engines—I mean—" The steward's voice faded as he met the mate's astonished glance.

"Are you trying to tell me," he demanded, "this ship's gone entirely crazy? The old man's wrestling with a puzzle and you suggest—or maybe I didn't hear right!—we slow the engine down to delay our docking."

The steward coughed. "I was just thinking out loud, sir," he mumbled. "Me and the second engineer having a small side bet as it were—"

The mate finished his coffee and got up. "That will be enough," he announced icily. "It's bad enough to think of a full-grown man monkeying with puzzles without the merchant service schedule being wrecked by such a thing. I'm surprised at you, Timkins!"

"Yes, sir," agreed Timkins unhappily, it also being part of a pantryman's job to agree with officers. "I'm sure you understand I was just talking private."

"Quite," agreed the mate and slamming on his cap went to his room, feeling very indignant. He had known of some very shady things that happened on freighters, anything from stealing the owner's daughter to broaching a cargo of silk stockings, but to suggest that a little engine trouble might be arranged . . .! He carefully closed his door and pulled out his notebook. Hmm! He hadn't known he'd gone in so deep. Twenty-five bucks to the port captain; twenty to the boss stevedore—Mosely had certainly broadcast his challenge—twenty more bucks to the third mate; five to his own room steward; ten to the cook . . . It looked like he'd mortgaged a month's pay on the ability of a tubby little man known as Captain Wattles to un-

tangle something that probably wouldn't untangle anyway. Of course he'd only taken the bets as a matter of duty, a definite upholding of the *Hyacinth's* honor and the pride of Captain Wattles against the insufferable sneering of Captain Mosely. But the matter of slowing the ship made things slightly different. That became a matter of the honor of the merchant service. After all, even if Wattles and Mosely did largely own their own ships and had to stand any loss . . . No, it was too much!

The mate went out on deck and started for the bridge and then discovered he was bound for the second engineer's room instead. The Second was busy messing up his wash basin with soft soap and trying to get some grease off his hands.

"Hi, chump," he greeted. "Just get through pushing another button to tell us where we are?" The mate carefully and ostentatiously dusted off the settee with his handkerchief and sat down.

"I could make some remarks about our RPM always dropping in your watch," he observed. "But I'll just inquire where you keep your bottle—and I don't mean the stuff you reserve for the customs. Also tell me, how much's the chief got bet on the old man's puzzle?"

"What makes you think he's got anything bet?" the Second demanded, ruining a clean towel wiping his hands. "How much're you in?"

"I don't play games," said the mate coldly. "But I did hear something about steam catching a cold and coughing around inside the cylinders."

"Someone's been telling you ghost stories," said the Second. "You must be in pretty deep with Mosely's gang. Whyn't you tell the truth for once? Be a little patient, like the old man, and confess your all. I think—"

He staggered and the mate jerked forward on the settee as the *Hyacinth* checked, surged ahead a second and then checked again and came to a full stop. They heard the engine-room telegraph's jangle and the thresh of the screw as it went astern. The mate grabbed his cap and headed for the door.

"Well, we won't dock on time anyway," he jerked as he bolted on deck. "Maybe someone's got ideas besides you and the pantryman!"

CAPTAIN WATTLES was already on the bridge when the mate arrived. The captain was still in his shirt-sleeves and suspenders, his glasses on the tip of his nose and the trade wind gently stirring his thin white hair while he absently jingled his unsolved puzzle on the for'ard rail and stared ahead. The third mate was all but crying.

"Never saw a thing, sir," he choked. "Just some discolored water ahead. Never thought—after all, the charts give us clear sea. I don't know—"

"Put her full ahead for a spell and then reverse her again," the captain suggested mildly. "It's likely one of those sandbanks that come and go in these waters. She ought to come off with some coaxing. If she ain't holed."

"I'll get some soundings, sir," said the mate and dropped down to the main deck where he found Chips already at work. The man shrugged and showed the mate his almost dry rod. "Just about normal. She's not making any water yet. I'll keep making the rounds and report." The mate nodded and dropped the hand-lead overside to get the water depths. The *Hyacinth* was shuddering and trembling around like a stranded fish as her engine jerked her back and forth, but she showed no signs of coming clear.

"Less'n two fathom of water up to midships, sir," the mate reported at last. "Her stern's clear. Chips says she's dry as a bone inside." Captain Wattles nodded and stopped the engine. No use jerking things to pieces needlessly. The long, easy swell would keep enough motion up to prevent excessive settling.

"We'll just have to figure it out and maybe wait for a good tide," he said. "Lucky we're running light."

"Lucky the weather's fine, sir," said the mate reasonably. "Trouble is we're on sand and it's liable to stick worse'n glue, and the longer she stays the more she settles."

"That's the truth," said the captain seriously. He stared at his puzzle, jiggled it a few times and bent an ear to the radio operator who also had a report.

"Got the *Sanshan,* sir. Captain Mosely wants to know if you need a pull off."

"Not yet," said Captain Wattles. "But he might keep in touch in case the

weather breaks." He jiggled his puzzle again. "This blasted gadget . . . Oh, mister. Get things ready to run an anchor out aft. With that, the engine, and a good tide we'll be all clear in no time."

"I hope so," said the mate fervently. "If we're stuck tight and this is one of those disappearing banks it's likely to take us down with it if it gets the notion."

"Nonsense," said the captain. "You've been aground before, surely. Just have a little patience." He went below to his cabin to worry over the main problem of the steel rings, and the mate looked hard at the Third. "You sure you ain't got a bet on with Mosely's crowd?" he demanded.

The third mate looked surprised. "Who hasn't? And what're you driving at?"

"Just that it's damned funny you have to pile up on the only sandbank in a hundred square miles of sea. If it was on the chart I'd be sure—but seeing it's not I'll give you the benefit of the doubt."

The Third sniffed, "You're nuts!" he said indignantly.

The mate cuffed his cap over his eyes as he stalked away. "It's possible," he agreed, and raised his voice for the bosun and the watch. He had to get out a kedge anchor.

THEY tried the kedge a couple of hours later, with the engine kicking astern and the heavy wire on the kedge humming taut to a winch drum. There was a tide raise of over a foot too, but nothing happened. Captain Wattles jiggled his puzzle and seemed surprised.

"With her riding clear astern and a beam swell working her she shouldn't be having all this trouble."

"Maybe it's a special sort of sand," suggested the third mate maliciously. "I've heard some's stickier than others."

"Well, anything's possible," Captain Wattles admitted. He looked up sharply as his first mate came wearily on the bridge. "Is anything wrong aft, mister?"

The mate looked sour. "Only the steam went off the winches five minutes back. Engine room tells me it's some sort of pipe trouble or something. We'd better wait until high tide tonight."

"No wonder she didn't budge," said the captain. "With no purchase on the kedge."

"If you ask me, sir," said the mate darkly, "you'd better call the *Sanshan* and let her give up a jerk."

Captain Wattles snorted. "The bill Mosely'd send me wouldn't be funny," he said indignantly. "No, we'll try again later. Funny the winches failed so suddenly. Maybe the shock of the ship striking, jarred something loose."

"Maybe," agreed the mate cryptically. "And maybe not. But if you ask me we'd better use the *Sanshan*. She'll be in easy steaming distance for a few hours yet."

"Oh, nonsense," snapped the captain. "If I can't get the *Hyacinth* off a sandbank I'll retire. I think if you could shift the kedge further to port it'd help the swells work and we can maybe pivot round and drag the bow clear."

"I'll attend to it, sir," the mate agreed. "As soon as that funny steam pipe is fixed."

"Ah, yes. Well, let me know when we're ready again." He went absently below while the mate dropped down to see Timkins the pantryman.

"I suppose this little delay suits you fine," the mate suggested.

The pantryman looked blank and rubbed his hands together. "Well, at least, sir, it gives the Old Man a few more hours. Accidents will happen."

"I've been wondering about that. And anyway it's the first time I ever sailed with a crew that didn't seem anxious to get to port. I suppose if the old man suddenly got that jig-saw apart you'd all bust your necks so we'd make fast time. Anyway," he added darkly, "don't let me get wind of any deliberate funny stuff for I'll turn in a report sure. And you can pass that along to all hands. We're running a freighter, not a crooked roulette wheel."

He got out before Timkins could make any innocent protests and consulted his notebook again. "Hmm!" he thought, noting again what his own bets were. "Maybe it *is* all accidents." He felt guilty at his own thoughts and was glad when he ran into the radio operator with another message from the *Sanshan*. Captain Mosely was evidently having his suspicions too.

IS THIS A STALL. MY CHART SHOWS NO SHOALS ANYWHERE NEAR POSITION YOU GAVE ME. ADVISE YOU IT IS ILLEGAL TO TRANSMIT FALSE REPORTS OF TROUBLE. WILL BE CLOSE YOU

ABOUT DAWN AND AM ALTERING COURSE STAND BY YOU IN CASE TROUBLE IS REAL. WHICH I DOUBT.

The mate grunted and took the message up to Captain Wattles, and Captain Wattles was hunched over his desk and jiggling his steel rings and bars again. There's a fundamental rule," he was mumbling to himself. "But patience, patience!" The mate had to speak twice before catching his attention, and the captain swung round to glare, annoyed at being disturbed. "Eh? Oh, it's you. Are we ready for another try?"

"Not yet, sir," explained the mate. "It's just another line from Captain Mosely." He read it aloud and Captain Wattles purpled and snatched at the flimsy to read for himself.

"Why, the damned, dirty crook! Thinking I'm maybe cheating. If anyone does that, it's Mosely, by God! I'm beginning to think this puzzle is a fake job. Can't be undone. Maybe something he had specially welded. I—"

"Yes, sir," agreed the mate. "And is there any answer?"

Captain Wattles adjusted his spectacles and read the radio again. "Tell him," he said acidly, "that if he wishes to waste time standing by me that's his affair. I definitely am not requesting it. You might also add go to hell again!"

The mate whistled as he left. "This certainly is a feud," he muttered. "Lucky they're both owners or someone'd be raising hell about wasting time. And all this for a hundred-buck bet and a dinner and a damned jig-saw puzzle. I think I'll have a little talk with the engine room about steam failure—or should I?" He decided it was only ethical that he should, but his notebook occasionally burned a warning hole in his pocket and he didn't like the idea of losing a month's pay. He sighed and did his duty.

THEY tried the *Hyacinth* again soon after dark, when the tide was full, and she grunted and groaned and wriggled, made a few tentative jars but remained fast. They tried emptying the after tanks to keep her high astern and down for'ard so the easy swell and the kedge drag might serve to swing her, and they even tried hoisting a stays'l aft to catch what wind there was and add to the pressure. But nothing worked. Evidently the *Hyacinth* had no intention of being hauled off by sheer force, and no intention of being cunningly pivoted loose. They worked by the light of electric clusters and only gave up when the tide started to fall again.

Captain Wattles was furious. He padded from one end of the ship to the other, making sure all was in order, his puzzle mechanically jingling between his hands, and his fury grew along with his puzzlement.

"She ought to shift," he stated. "She's light and she's dry. It doesn't make sense."

"Well, we've done everything possible to keep her vibrating," the mate soothed him. "But you know how sand is. Longer you're on it the tighter it sticks." He stared aft to the horizon and touched the captain's arm. "Well, there's the *Sanshan,* sir. Made better time than I thought. Now if she'd just give us a pull . . ."

Captain Wattles grew icy calm. "I thought I'd made myself plain on that score. So long as the vessel and crew are in no immediate danger we stay here and work the matter out. If worst comes to the worst I'll radio port for a tug before I'll pay Mosely a damned cent!"

The mate shrugged and watched the distant lights of the *Sanshan* as she came closer and finally hove to, well clear of any possible danger, to await the dawn. Her radio was probably already asking for details as to water depths and strengths of any currents. The mate decided he'd better tell Sparks to hold up any message for a while as the Old Man was in no mood for parleying with Mosely.

The old man wasn't. He had plumped himself at his desk and was poking at his obstinate puzzle again while his mind wandered over the ship's predicament. Though he would never have admitted it he was a little relieved the *Sanshan* was standing by . . . just in case. If the weather broke suddenly he might really find himself in a fix and he had a crew to take care of. One of the crew was busy in his cabin right now, turning down the bunk in case the captain wanted to turn in for a few hours; dusting around and straightening things that didn't need it, while he watched Captain Wattles ponder his problems. The room steward was a sort of dele-

gate to see what progress the Old Man was making, and is was pretty obvious he was making none at all.

"If you'd care for coffee and sandwiches, sir," the steward suggested—but Captain Wattles merely grunted and tried to concentrate. There must be something else he could do, he considered. There was an extra high tide around four bells, six o'clock, and if that didn't bring the *Hyacinth* off he might have to admit he was stumped. Maybe if he kept listing the ship from port to starboard—maneuvering the tanks, filling the boats with water on one side and moving all heavy gear over until she shifted; then reversing the procedure so she'd list the other way . . .

The room steward started washing out the hand basin and said cheerfully, "Too bad we're in such a spot, sir. If we could just wash that sand away like the dirt here comes adrift, why . . ."

Captain Wattles went rigid and then suddenly swung around. "What? What was that you said?"

The steward blinked. "Why, sir, just about washing the dirt here . . ."

"Ah," said Captain Wattles. His chubby face shone. "My boy, that's a stroke of genius. I should have thought of it before. Tell the chief engineer I want him . . . No, never mind. I'll go see him!" He was almost running as he went out of the door, leaving the room steward open-mouthed behind him, and he shook his fist at the distant lights of the *Sanshan*, the fist that clasped faithfully around his unsolved puzzle. "Oh, we'll see," he yelled. "We'll see, you lousy old vulture. Just waiting around to pick my bones!" He burst into the chief engineer's cabin without even the ceremony of knocking and thereafter was closeted with that officer for well over an hour.

The messroom steward, who was called in once or twice, could only report the two men were drawing pictures and making some sort of calculations. "And if you ask me," added the messroom steward bitterly, "the old man's letting us down. He ain't even working on the puzzle at all."

THE mate's opinion was almost as adverse, when he was ordered to rout all hands out and put them at the disposal of the engine room, a bitter pill in itself. "The Old Man's finally blown his top," he confided to the Third. "Now he's playing with pipes."

"Pipes?" inquired the Third. "What the hell for?"

"Why ask me?" demanded the mate, exasperated. "I ain't even been consulted as yet." That really irked him. But irked or not he had to go to work and hoist many lengths of iron piping through the engine-room skylight and help dismantle other piping on deck. The engineers set up vises and brought out saws and blow-torches and other gear and went to work.

Captain Wattles and the chief were busy with taking soundings overside and mumbling about couplings and pressures, while the electric clusters flooded the main deck with light again.

ARE YOU STILL PLAYING GAMES, demanded the *Sanshan's* blinker. Captain Mosely was both curious and irritated. *WILL PULL YOU OFF FOR TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS AND CANCEL THE BET.*

"Ignore it, ignore it," said Captain Wattles. "We've still got a shot in the locker. Two thousand dollars be damned!" And he sat happily on the forehatch and concentrated on his puzzle while the men lowered piping overside and the engineers fashioned the couplings. The mate was almost bursting.

"Look, sir," he stated, "if you'd just give me a clue I could maybe help!"

"You're doing splendidly! Everyone's doing splendidly," soothed the captain. "Why, didn't I tell you? We're just going to wash her out."

"Wash . . ." started the mate and a faint glimmering came to him. "Oh," he said and subsided. He stared hard at Captain Wattles, intent on his problem, and it came to the mate that maybe the Old Man wasn't so dumb after all. Maybe the reason he was sitting there under the cluster lights, giving a public display of his work, was so the crew would know he was doing *his* part to clean up all those bets. Maybe it was just good psychology. Maybe—well, after all, a skipper with any sense at all might have an idea how the crew felt. And then maybe not. There were too many puzzling things about the whole business, aside from the bunch of steel rings and bars the Old Man was playing with. The mate noticed the men

were stealing glances now and then at the skipper's busy fingers and then getting back to work with some real zest. The mate scratched his nose and swore.

"Well, she's about ready," said the chief engineer sometime later. "Do we wait for high tide?"

"No, start right away," said Captain Wattles.

And he got up from the forehatch and ascended to the navigation bridge and all hands waited. Then began the heavy rhythmic beating of the *Hyacinth's* pumps, forcing water down through the pipes lowered at either side of the bow and, at intervals, almost to midships; forcing water into and loosening the clinging pack sand. Nothing happened and Captain Wattles gave no word to start the engine or handle the kedge and the mate shifted about nervously.

"Don't you think, sir—" he began and Captain Wattles waved him to silence and held his puzzle on the for'ard bridge rail and wriggled it about.

"Patience, mister. Give things time."

MAKE IT FIFTEEN HUNDRED, said the *Sanshan's* blinker. *I CANT STAND BY ALL DAY.*

"It's costing him money," agreed the captain absently. "But that's his grief." He looked up after a while and sort of tested the feel of the ship with his feet. She seemed to be quivering a little and working more easily to the swell. "All right. Get aft to the kedge, mister," he ordered the mate. "And try and make it a long, slow pull. Put the engine slow astern." He jiggled his puzzle again and looked around. The dawn was beginning to break and the *Sanshan's* blinker was at work again.

ONE THOUSAND AND THATS FINAL. I'M HEADING FOR PORT RIGHT AWAY.

No one paid any attention. On his bridge, the mate thought as he motioned the men to tighten the kedge line, Captain Mosely must be hopping mad and also burned up with curiosity. By all rights a ship on the sand as long as the *Hyacinth* had been should be very, very willing indeed to get a tow. The pumps throbbed away, the engine turned, the pull from the kedge was apparent from the way the wire stretched. And the tide was rising again.

"If she comes at all she'll come easy," muttered the mate. "Just easy, like a cork from a bottle."

But he doubted even then that she'd shift, and wrong about the way she did come. She shuddered a few times, took a slow list to port and then as if tired of resting so long slid back into deep water with a jar that staggered all hands as much as it had when she struck.

The mate held on to a backstay to keep his feet and yelled at the winchman as the drum began to race, and the kedge wire came in hand-over-hand, until the *Hyacinth's* engine was sent ahead and checked the wallowing ship's sternway and brought her under control. The mate ran an arm over his damp forehead and swore dazedly. "Washed her out, by God!" he mumbled. "Washed her clean out!" He went midships and up on the bridge. The Third mate was bent over and holding his stomach. The jar had jammed him hard against the telegraph and it hurt. Captain Wattles was sitting ludicrously on the deck planking where the jar had put him, and was gaping at his open hands.

"Well, sir, she's off," said the mate unnecessarily. "I'll ease her up on the kedge to pick it up . . ." He stopped and stared. Captain Wattles was shaking his hands as if he held a pair of dice in them.

"Look," he gurgled. "I done it! Look! There it is!"

THE mate looked and swallowed hard. In the old man's hands, all apart and free, were a few steel rings and bars. The puzzle was solved. "Just like that," babbled Captain Wattles. "I was just standing there and fooling with the damned thing and the ship came back and sat me down and look! It just came apart!" The mate coughed and looked around. The Third was still swearing and nursing his stomach. The helmsman was intent keeping the rudder fore and aft. No one had paid any attention. The mate tapped the captain's shoulder.

"Here, let me help you up, sir—I—er—wouldn't mention it was just an accident. You figured the puzzle out yourself."

Captain Wattles grunted to his feet, his eyes still fascinated at his triumph, and he came to with a start as the mate's words

(Continued on page 145)

THE OLD

By
HAROLD R.
STOAKES

★

ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK EGGENHOFER

MAN FINALLY DIED

JOSIAH BOLIVAR kept the long-barreled rifle rigid along the gunwale of the keelboat while a Ree arrow ripped the sail overhead. Along the base of the clay bluffs of the Missouri River, the late afternoon sunlight slanted yellowed shadows into the water.

Josiah glanced apprehensively at the hole the arrow had made. That would be old Sittin' Goose again, he reflected acrimoniously. There warn't another Injun along the whole length of the Missouri with a bow arm strong enough to shred a keelboat sail that was floatin' down midstream and mindin' its own business. Sometimes it was more bother to get a passel of fresh-stretched beaver skins down the Missouri than any amount of a fur trader's whiskey was worth.

"Just this once you'd think old Sittin' Goose would have more to do than fret himself over a pesky boatload of furs,"

Josiah snorted bitterly. "What with the Ree villages surrounded by half the United States Army, and that heathen Fireheart promisin' to gouge out Sittin' Goose's liver and pickle it for his grandchildren."

Josiah picked out a motion of brown along the shore, and squeezed down nervelessly on the trigger of the long-barreled gun. A Ree warrior stiffened and plummeted down the clay bank to the turbid waters below.

"Got the heathen," Josiah said bitingly, "but it warn't Sittin' Goose."

Josiah swiped the back of his hand across his lips. Yes sir, just this once you'd think old Sittin' Goose would have his hands full. Trappers that had come back up the Missouri said Colonel Leavenworth had marched all the way from Fort Atkinson with enough cannon to blast the Rees to kingdom come.

Major Ashley was supposed to be there, too, with those downy-faced kids of his that folks was startin' to call the Mountain Men. And so was Chief Fireheart and about eight hundred yellin' Sioux, anxious to get rid of the Rees so they could carve up the whites by themselves.

Josiah hunkered down, reloading the gun, his puckered lips drawn tightly up around the edges of his beard. The trouble was that the military was always trying to blast somebody or something off the face of the earth, and that Major Ashley wasn't a heap sight better. The first thing a man had to learn when he come into trappin' country was that he had to get along with things and folks as he found them.

JOSIAH allowed that in the seventeen-odd years he'd been trapping the upper Missouri, he had done a passable job of getting along. With the exception of Sittin' Goose he didn't have an enemy from the mouth of the Grand to the headwaters of the Yellowstone. And the efforts of Sittin' Goose to relieve him of his furs each spring had come to be one of those expected things, like high-water floods and poison whiskey.

Only this time it wasn't spring. It was August. A busted arm had kept Josiah holed up in his mountain cabin or he'd have had his furs down and some of the fur tradin' man's liquor drunk up long before.

Josiah slipped the rifle back over the gunwale and swept the shore with his jay sharp eyes. As usual the Missouri wasn't doing a dang thing to help him, either. The keelboat was floating slowly with the current, without a ripple of air to push the sail along, and down river a ways where the channel cut toward the shore there were more than fifty bedaubed Ree devils sittin' their ponies and waitin'.

"It's like I been tellin' you," Josiah said. "I ain't got so long to live. I'm goin' to die pretty soon. Most any day now, I reckon."

Josiah glanced toward the prow of the keelboat where Bennet was plastered down behind a bale of beaver pelts, but Bennet wasn't paying much attention to his talk.

Anyway, Josiah reflected, he could thank Sittin' Goose for showing him what kind of a man his son was before he died. Bennet was a Bolivar all right, dsepite the raising Keziah had given him. He had the Bolivars' puckered lips and cold hand alongside the barrel of a hunting rifle.

Funny how those lips ran to a family. They said Great Grandpap Bolivar had started them. Great Grandpap had come across the Atlantic stowed away on a British man-o'-war, livin' on salt water and rats' whiskers. Being naturally thirsty when he set his feet on dry land he'd grabbed up the first jug that come to hand and drained it with a swig. It being a jug of vinegar, Grandpap's lips hadn't straightened out for the rest of his born days.

Grandpap started the breed and ever after that the Bolivars had been noted for trapping, puckered lips, and an unreasonable hankering after good rum and whiskey.

THE keelboat wallowed sluggishly toward the cottonwood fringed river bend. Josiah heard the screams of the Rees as the boat drifted closer to shore. Then a ripple of air caught the sail from around the curve.

He grasped the tiller as the wind stiffened against the sail and steered a swerving arc away from the sandbar point. The rage of the Rees trumpeted in his ears.

When the boat was safely out of gun and

arrow range, Josiah stood up in the stern and glanced at Bennet.

"Guess I got a mite longer to live," Josiah said, shifting the ear points of his blanket cap.

Bennet was a Bolivar all right, but Josiah could see that Keziah had left her imprint on him, too, and given him a good raisin'. There was pain in Bennet's black eyes, but he wasn't one to get sassy with his pa. Bennet stood silently near the prow, looking back toward the point where the Rees were clustered.

" 'Tain't nothin' to fret yerself about," Josiah said. "Me and Sittin' Goose is old friends. We have a to-do every time I come down river."

Josiah allowed that there was a great deal of truth in his own words. The annual battle with Sittin' Goose had come to be something that he counted on to break the monotony after the long winter, and there was as much respect as there was enmity in his feelings for the old Ree chief.

"Next time the old heathen's going to get me for sure," Josiah said. "I'm just as good as dead already."

Josiah said the words before he remembered, somewhat sorrowfully, that there wouldn't be a next time. This was his last trip down the river. Perhaps it was just as well.

When a man found after seventeen years that he had an unfaithful wife, it was time to go back Ohio way and straighten things out. Then, too, the mountains weren't what they used to be.

Ashley was dotting the rivers with his Mountain Men and Colonel Leavenworth swore he'd clear out the Rees so a man could sail a keelboat from St. Louis to the Yellowstone without bothering to load his gun.

It sure wouldn't be a proper place for a breed of trappers who felt that a mite of danger was the normal price a man had to pay for the furs he skinned and the whiskey he drank.

"Sittin' Goose and me's been feudin' ever since I come up the river," Josiah explained. "Started most peculiar."

"How did it start?" Bennet questioned.

"Fust time I came up I got myself caught in one of them Ree villages," Josiah explained. "The Rees was peaceable then before the military started pushin' them around."

Josiah adjusted a thin-bladed skinning knife inside the red sash that girded his buckskin hunting shirt.

"Me and Sittin' Goose smoked a pipeful or two, and then the old heathen made me a gift of an Indian daughter of his. Not knowin' that it was a insult to turn down an Injun's gift, and naturally being faithful to yer Ma, I couldn't keep her."

Josiah paused, looking with shrewd eyes at Bennet. Being faithful across all those miles was something more than he could say for Keziah. "Me and Sittin' Goose has been feudin' ever since," he added.

Josiah studied Bennet's face. Bennet was the spittin' image of his Ma, except for the Bolivar lips.

JOSIAH had married Keziah during a moment of youthful impetuousness and hadn't discovered until after the vows were said that she had a tongue with the bite of a steel bear trap. Keziah hadn't thought much of men who frittered their time a chasin' after fur bearing critters. Keziah had led him to an Ohio peach farm and settled him down.

Josiah had stuck it out for nigh onto six years, reasoning that the pelt of a trapped animal belonged to the party that skinned it. But when them Lewis and Clark fellers had come down the Missouri with yarns about beavers bigger than Ohio cows it had been too much for a trapper to resist. Josiah had left Ohio during the night, and never returned.

But during all those seventeen years in the mountains, he could vow that he'd kept rigidly faithful to Keziah. Every spring he had seen that a check was sent out from the trading post, which had cut pretty deep into his drinkin' money, and he'd always pictured Keziah as frettin' herself away a-waitin' for him.

Josiah had always said he'd meet Keziah halfway, say like the middle of the Mississippi River. When Bennet had hunted him out in his mountain cabin, Josiah had felt sure that Bennet had come to patch up one of them re-con-cil-i-ations.

Bennet hadn't come with any such talk, though. It seemed that Keziah had done right smart by herself over the years. She'd built up a prosperous peach farm, and now she'd been making eyes at another peach farmer.

Keziah wanted to get married again, and Bennet had come all the way up the Yellowstone to get Josiah's signature on paper saying it was all right for Keziah to get herself a divorce!

Desertion, the papers said smack dab on the face of them. Josiah's whiskers twitched until his face itched. If there was one thing that burnt a man all the way down the sides of his fringed leggings, it was an unfaithful wife.

"You might remember to tell your Ma I could have had me an Indian wife all these years," Josiah said significantly.

Bennet was looking away, across the Missouri again, and not paying as much attention as might be expected from a respectful son.

"Do you think we've seen the last of Sittin' Goose this trip?" Bennet asked.

Josiah shook his head.

"Sittin' Goose will follow along the river bank, but I know a cave where an Injun has to get smack astraddle your gun sights to follow after. We can run the boat into it," Josiah said. "Tomorrow we'll be down river where them Leavenworth and Ashley fellers is shootin' off."

Bennet sat down on the baled beaver pelts.

"Sure be a good thing when the river's safe for a man to travel on." Bennet said, hunching his shoulders forward.

Josiah frowned and spat over the gunwale. Bennet had come to the mountain cabin just when Josiah was resting up from his busted arm, and the two had had a tolerable time for getting acquainted.

Bennet was bitten by the trapper bug the way you'd expect a Bolivar to be bit. After he was through runnin' his Ma's errands Bennet would be comin' back into the mountains.

But not the way a Bolivar really should. Bennet thought Colonel Leavenworth was doing praiseworthy work comin' all the way up to clean out the Rees, instead of trying to learn to get along with people like he should. Bennet was itching to sign up with Ashley and be one of them there Mountain Men.

Mountain Men! Josiah spat at a whirling river eddy. Why, they even said Ashley had a young milk-faced kid named Jedediah Smith who went around with a Bible sticking out of his shirt, and the knees of his buckskin britches all bagged out from gettin' down on his knees and sayin' his prayers.

Josiah looked long and resentfully into the shadows of the coming night that darkened the river. With things coming to pass in the mountains the way they was, it was about time for a man to go back to Ohio at that. After a man had tangled with grizzlies, lived on salted beaver tails, and built himself a fire out of ice cakes from the Yellowstone River, he was more or less ready to set up housekeeping with Keziah again anyway.

Josiah steered the keelboat in under the bluff and into the cave that he'd used many seasons over when hiding out from Sittin' Goose. He noticed that Bennet was still standing firm-faced near the bow.

"Don't give no thoughts to worryin' about Sittin' Goose," Josiah said reassuringly. "It's just a little friendly argument we has between us every year."

JOSIAH slept and dreamt of Ohio peach orchards with Keziah's face hanging from every branch, but when he awakened it was with the shrill rage of the Rees in his ears.

The wind was full across the bulging sail of the keelboat, but the boat wasn't moving. Clay-colored moonlight cut across Bennet's back where he struggled with the tiller of the boat. The boat was snagged fast on a sandbar with Ree devils pouring down from the river bank, busting their lungs as they frothed through the water.

"What in thunderation we doin' out here?" Josiah yelled.

Bennet's face was ashen as he struggled to free the boat from the grip of the sandbar.

"I figured you told that story about you and Sitting Goose having a private feud just so I wouldn't be scared," Bennet said thinly.

"But what's that to do with taking the boat out of the cave?"

Josiah slammed himself down behind the gunwale as lead ripped the sail near his head.

"It's pretty clear cut," Bennet panted. "Sitting Goose is bringing reinforcements down to the Ree villages. We got to get word to Colonel Leavenworth and Major Ashley."

Josiah slipped the long-barreled gun up

over the side of the boat. Bennet was acting just like them Mountain Men acted, trying to cover himself with glory.

"Tarnation," Josiah grunted, sighting nervelessly. "I always figured I didn't have long to live. Looks like my time's 'bout come due."

It certainly did look like Sittin' Goose was after his scalp for sure. Usually the old chief had a passel of braves with him, but this time it looked like the whole dang Ree nation. The Rees were bunching as they drove across the sandbar, their vermilion-daubed bodies glinting with moonlight, the hoofs of the ponies foaming the water.

Josiah sighted carefully. It was time, he knew, for shooting horses and not men. Josiah blasted and saw an Indian pony's legs buckle, throwing its rider into the water.

The threshing body of the horse caught others behind it until a half dozen Rees had piled up, breaking the middle of the charging ranks.

Momentarily diverted, the Rees swerved and then came on again. Josiah's fingers felt colder against the steel of the rifle barrel as the screaming anger of the Indians shivered down through him.

Lead shredded the keelboat sail. A hard-stoned arrow ripped the edge of Josiah's blanket cap, carrying it into the angry waters of the river. A wave struck the side of the boat, rocking it on the sand.

Josiah fired again, and heard a grunt of pain near his side. Bennet rolled back, blood thick across his forehead.

Josiah's puckered lips were sucked even tighter around the edges of his beard as he tried frantically to reload. Across the sandbar the Rees charged close, with Sitting Goose in the lead.

Sitting Goose was bent low over the mane of a flying Indian pony. Moonlight streamed down the muscled sides of his naked thighs.

Josiah saw the hate-lined curve of Sitting Goose's cheeks. Then when the Ree chief was almost on top of the boat, Josiah dropped the gun and seized the keelboat sail.

Straining against the boom, Josiah swung the sail so that it caught the charging pony head on, blanketing its eyes.

The horse swerved along the side, blinded by the sail. Josiah lurched across the boat. There was a heavy bump. The hard pull of the horse raked the keelboat free of the sandbar just before the sail broke away from the mast.

A Ree warrior's fingers were gripped along the gunwale. Josiah slashed down with his knife and saw the waters of the Missouri boil over the Indian's head.

ANGRILY, the Ree pulled up on the edge of deep water as the keelboat drifted away. Still under fire, Josiah rigged a new sail. Near the bow, Bennet was breathing heavily. An Indian arrow had caught him along the head, striking more with the stony side of it than with the point.

Josiah thrust his knife back inside the red sash at his waist. The tiller and the sail were about all that one man could take care of. With the screaming of the Rees still in his ears, Josiah headed for Devil's Island down river.

Once the keel-boat was safely beached, there would be time for bringing Bennet around.

Minutes later, Josiah drove the boat onto the sandy beach of the island and hurried forward. The keelboat lurched sideways and Josiah turned.

Sitting Goose loomed up midway of the boat, with the moon a white light across the edge of his long-bladed knife.

Josiah's puckered lips sucked inward. Evidently the boom of the sail had knocked the old heathen unconscious and he had fallen off his pony and down among the fur bales. There was a finger-long welt across the darkness of Sitting Goose's forehead.

Josiah glanced at the still unloaded gun in the bottom of the boat as Sitting Goose stalked around the edge of the sail. Josiah's fingers hardened over the bone handle of his own knife. He leaped over the gunwale onto the sandy beach.

The fur-heaped confines of a keelboat was no place for a man to fight for his life. Josiah whirled as his moccasins touched the sand. Sitting Goose was taking his time, stepping carefully from the boat, the set line of his mouth savoring the moment.

"You murderin' old heathen," Josiah rasped. "I'm going to carve out yer gizzard and use it for catfish bait."

Sitting Goose grunted, standing with

the moon flat across the fullness of his bow arm as he leaped forward.

Josiah barely had time to spring aside as the giant hunting knife whipped the air along his head. Josiah ripped upwards, skinning blood along the Ree chief's arm as he turned. Then Josiah stumbled backwards as Sitting Goose's leg caught him above the knee.

On the sand Josiah twisted and rolled, feeling the bite of Sitting Goose's knife along his back. Then he was on his feet again.

Time after time Sitting Goose charged, cautiously now, circling cunningly, backing Josiah away.

Josiah was smaller and quicker, but the giant Ree chieftain was made of stone, untiring and vengeful.

Blood oozed down the side of Josiah's face, matting the thickness of his beard. His back was moist and warm where the Ree chieftain's knife had raked. Sitting Goose's blood flowed darkly along the Indian's forearm.

Josiah backed away from Sitting Goose's charge, panting heavily. Then he whirled angrily.

It was no use waiting for Sitting Goose to wear him out and cut him down. Time after time Josiah had retreated. Now he sprang forward, trying to catch the Ree chief off guard.

Sitting Goose stumbled a little as Josiah drove his knife forward. The Indian turned so that the blade drove into his arm. Josiah felt the grasp of Sitting Goose's arm around him.

Pinioned, Josiah glanced prayerfully at the keelboat. Sitting Goose had the blood-stained knife whipped overhead, ready to plunge it into Josiah's back.

Josiah felt the sweaty heaviness of Sitting Goose against him as he wrenched his own arm free. Sitting Goose's face was warm against Josiah's head.

Desperately, Josiah brought his arm up, driving the bone handle toward the Ree chieftain's jaw.

Josiah felt the slumping of Sitting Goose's head, and the slipping strain of the chief's arm. Josiah drove his knife blade forward, slamming it into the Ree's ribs.

On the ground Josiah raised his arm to slash down again, and then he paused. Sitting Goose's head was lolled back, the eyelids glazed down. Blood flowed warmly from his torn side.

Another knife thrust, Josiah decided, wouldn't be needed. More than likely his blade had pierced Sitting Goose's heart, and the old heathen would lay there and bleed himself to death. Serve him right in the bargain.

Back in the keelboat, Bennet was just beginning to sit up, shaking his head groggily. After Bennet's head was patched up, and his own wounds bandaged, Josiah set sail again, his lips puckered morosely as he watched the outlines of Devil's Island disappear in the darkness.

WHEN they reached the Ree villages just a little above the mouth of the Grand where Colonel Leavenworth and Major Ashley were supposed to be, they found the spot deserted, and it wasn't until they got down to the trading post of the Missouri Fur Company that they found out what had happened.

It seemed that after Colonel Leavenworth had drug his keelboats full of cannon all the way up the Missouri and got them gun-sighted on the Ree villages, he'd gone and offered the Rees a truce. Offered them a truce when he had all that military to back him up, along with Major Ashley's Mountain Men and more than eight hundred of Chief Fireheart's ornery Sioux.

While the colonel was dickering, the Rees sneaked off in the night, which accounted for the fact that old Sittin' Goose had so many of his braves on the upper Missouri.

To some folks the colonel's truce didn't make sense. Major Ashley was raging like a grizzly in a bear trap. The Mountain Men was stone-faced as the Rockies. Old Fireheart had ridden off to sulk.

Josiah, though, was willing to allow that there were good reasons for the way Colonel Leavenworth had acted. Somewhere along that march, the colonel had learned what every trapper that ever came up the Missouri learned—that a man had to get along with things and people as he found them.

Meanwhile, though, the Missouri wasn't a mite safer for women and children and men with uncocked guns than it had been before.

Josiah might have taken some consola-

tion from this latter fact, but even the rum at the trading post's plank bar didn't serve to salve his spirits. Old Sittin' Goose was dead, and there'd be no more friendly feudin' along the Missouri. It was high time that a man went back to his wife and buckled down to dyin'.

Josiah edged in among the strangers along the plank bar, moody and resentful. One of them fuzz-faced Mountain Men was talking, but Josiah tried not to listen. It got so a man saw more strangers every year. The mountains was changin'.

Bennet had signed up with Ashley and aimed to make a trapper of himself, but Josiah knew that Bennet would never belong to the old breed of men. About the time Bennet's hair got long enough to make a man of him, Bennet would be braidin' it down fancy the way them free trappers did.

Josiah raised the rum cup toward his puckered lips. Then his hand froze.

"Here I was just a-floatin' past Devil's Island," the fuzz-faced youngster was saying, "when all of a sudden here was all them Rees with Sittin' Goose propped up in a dugout."

"Dead," Josiah grunted. "Dead as a empty rum keg."

"Dead, hell," the Mountain Man spat. "He was sittin' up and a-gruntin' . . . sounded like Injun cussin' but I cleared out fast."

"Sittin' Goose is dead," Josiah intoned dully. "It was me that kilt him on Devil's Island. I drove my knife clean through his heart."

There was silence. Josiah heard an old trapper behind him.

"Hell, you ever sink a knife into Sittin' Goose's heart and it'd bend the point off."

The Mountain Man was red-faced the way you'd expect a youngster to get when his word was argued.

"I got a stack of beaver furs that says Sittin' Goose is still alive."

Josiah had already drunk up part of his pelts, and a man rightfully needed to go back to his wife with something to show for seventeen years' absence.

"I'll take your word for it," Josiah allowed.

Then when Josiah lifted the cup to his mouth, he found that the rum tasted sweet for the first time since he'd hit the post. If Sittin' Goose really was livin', it might be worthwhile goin' up the river again, so long as the Missouri hadn't yet become a safe place for women and little children to travel.

Josiah's thoughts wavered. Bennet bumped his elbow. Bennet had those desertion papers. Josiah's mind was suddenly made up.

"Are you going back to Ohio or are you going to sign these papers?" Bennet asked sharply.

Josiah noted that the boy's tongue had the bite of a bear trap, just like his Ma's.

Josiah turned his back.

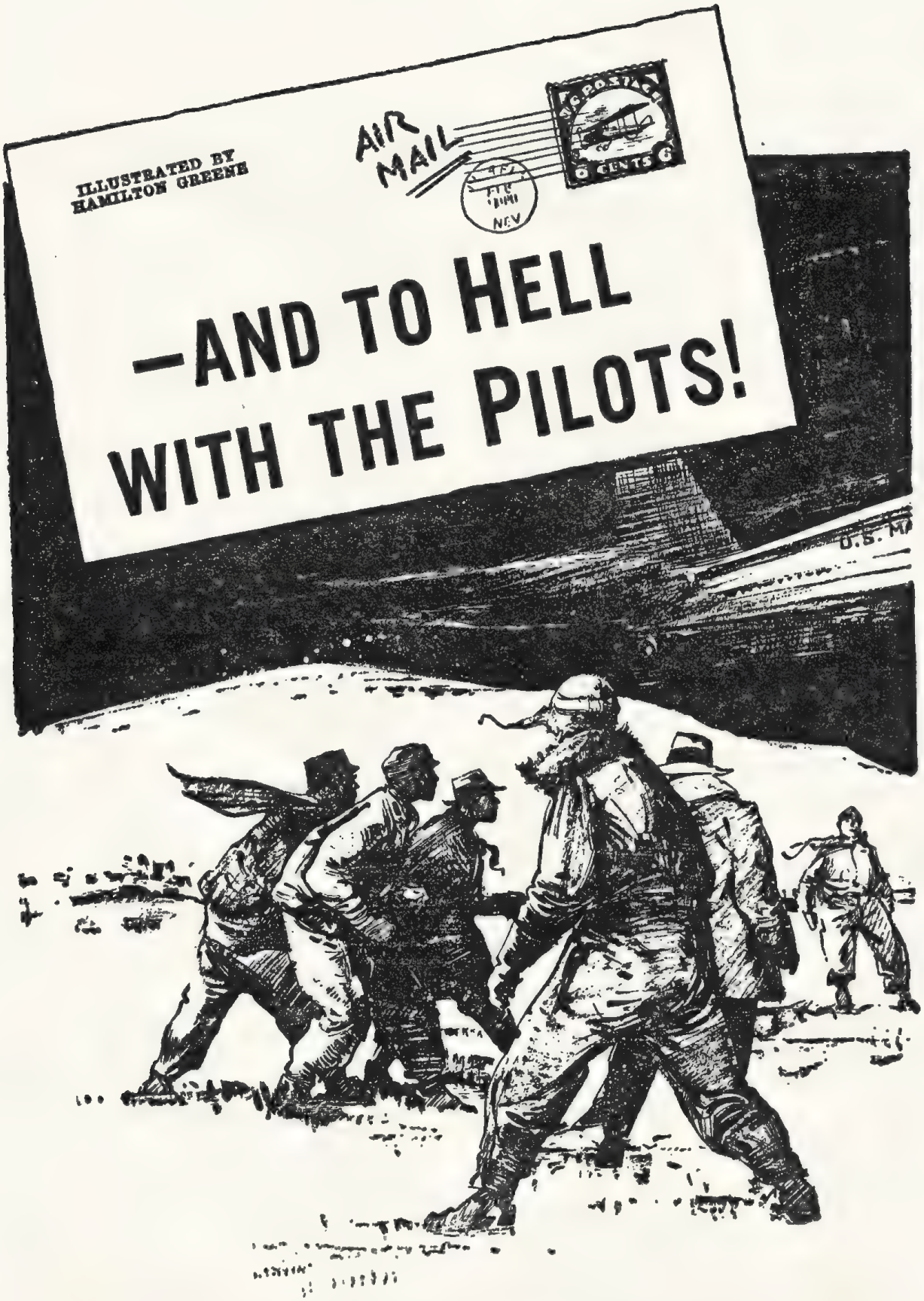
"Just tell her the old man finally died," Josiah said. "I'll be dead afore those papers reach Ohio anyways."

Bennet had been drinking with the Mountain Men and he was ready to get sassy, even with his Pa.

"Die, hell," Bennet snapped. "You'll live to be a hundred. You sign, or you're going back to Ohio."

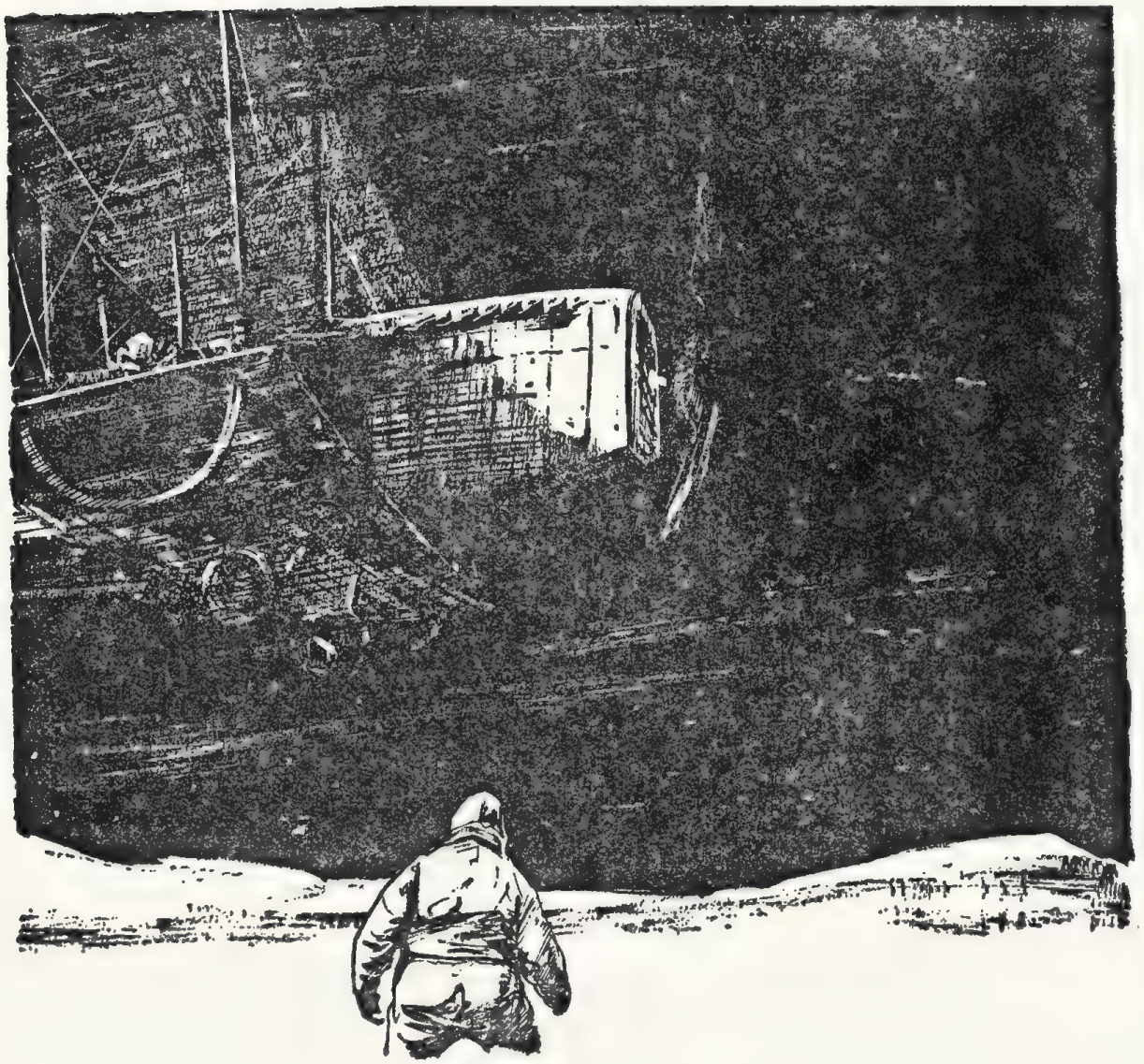
Josiah saw the word desertion. He debated; then signed grudgingly. Keziah needn't have got so all-fired impatient. She might at least have waited until she was a widow.

Josiah took a swig of rum to ease his ruffled pride. That wouldn't have been so long. Old Sittin' Goose would catch him next trip for sure. He was just as good as dead already.



The Liberty yelled with rage as the anchors fell away—and the ship was off the ground without a run.

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY



IT WAS teeth-chattering cold in Cheyenne, and the early-morning lobby of the Plains Hotel still had that morgue-like lull upon it. There was a sun coming up in the east and off in the west the Laramie Range had caught fire under its glow and sparkled and flashed like the Big Rock Candy Mountain as far as you could see, north to south, and the world looked crisp and cold. Damned cold. In the Plains lobby, where the radiator clanked and hissed, only a few commercial men were afoot, toters of sample-case and bag, men who must make early drags east or west, south for Denver or north for the hell'n'gone country poleward toward Butte.

The elevator door clanked open and disgorged something that should have been dead and buried seventy-odd years ago—a pony express rider. Or had the commercial men had a few too many last night? That was it, for this couldn't be.

But it was, and he had strolled over to

the desk and was talking to the sleepy-eyed clerk of the dog watch. Also, he was buying cigarettes. The watching commercial men saw him tuck four decks in different pockets here and there, and he tucked them away with care, tenderly, as though making sure that they'd be exactly where they should be when wanted. So, too, for the matches.

"You sure do like your smokes, Captain," the clerk mused.

"Yep," the man out of the past said. "And when I need 'em, I need 'em bad. Sometimes when I buck a headwind on this Cheyenne-Rock Springs hop, I kill four packs, end to end. It's the only way a man has of passing the time away. Well, if a good-looking lady comes looking for a room, let her have mine. But I should be seeing you day after tomorrow. Be seein' you."

HE STARTED for the door. He was wearing leather chaps over wool pants, and the pant bottoms were tucked into high laced woodsman's boots. The leather flying coat was old and black, and its short skirt was cinched tightly by the chap's belt. He had a waddie's handkerchief at his neck, and only the helmet and goggles were different from the trappings of that guy who pounded the pony express route; for this air-mail pilot even wore a six-gun on the hip. And he wore all that for the same reason the pony express rider wore 'em: for the year was 1920, and an air-mail pilot knew that the job specified long, hard flights but all too often called for long, hellish walks. Back-to-the-railroad walks through snow-clad mountains and over endless, untamed range, perhaps twenty or thirty miles of slipping and sliding, maybe miles and miles through hip-high, wet sagebrush. It had torn the heart out of men and ripped the duds from their frames. The pony express fellow really had it soft. Shucks, man, he at least had a trail. He at least knew where he was—on the ground—but your early air-mail pilot had nothing or nobody—not even the sight of horse's ears; when the sky fell, everything went zero zero, and his world shrunk down to the length of his ship's snout and that ghastly whirling disc of mist which was his prop—a prop dragging him at 120 m.p.h. toward what? Death on a mountainside or in the canyon or on the butte? Or just the hard bumps, the untangling, plus the long walk?

The humped, smoke-puffing, early-morning starting crew met Captain Slim Collison out at the curb. The gang was riding the air-mail pickup wagon; and, even as Slim, they, to a man, were dressed for the trail. Air mail was that way—ready. They might get Slim off the ground within the next twenty minutes, then, within the next hour or so, get a railroad dispatcher's message advising them that it was time to start west and get Slim and his ship off a shelf in the Laramies. No use talking, that first U. S. Air Mail service was robust. It had men of steel, guys fit for the trail, and reaching for the stars. It had men fighting railroad cliques, battling Washington obstructionists, and, at the same time, scrapping like hell against certain elements within its own sky family—nasty, snide elements that, on official lists, were of air mail, yet not of it. Those elements had the power to tell the Slim Collisons when to fly, even how to fly; and the Slim Collisons had to do as ordered, or stop eating.

Topmost and ever threatening among the elements which could terminate a pilot's—or mechanic's—eating was bulbous, blustering, blabbering, cigar-chewing John A. Googan, super of the Pacific Division, which was really the mountain division, starting at Cheyenne and stopping where an overshot landing could crash a luckless pilot smack up against that famed Golden Gate. John A. Googan's assay of John A. was colossal, ranking him only third to God and the angels, and he wasn't too damned certain that the angels really ranked. After all, angels rate as flying personnel, and John A. didn't like guys who flew. He had had too much trouble with them. Those danged pushers-of-clouds and brushers-of-stars wouldn't take orders. What's more, and worse, they wouldn't bow low—getting their heads out of the blue—and say, "Oh, yes Mr. Googan. You are right, Mr. Googan," nor would the lousy greaseball macs in the hangars. Only on the field managers and the office forces would do that, and only they, of all air-mail personnel, were worth a damn in John A.'s opinion. Yes, the pilots and the macs were very hard on the super. But the super was working on that

—on them—and one of these fine days he'd make 'em all walk Mexican. For that matter, that was one of the great troubles with Mr. John A. Googan's Pacific Division: too much Mex walking already, too damned much lead in their pants. By hell ,it had to change! John A. was going to see to it that they got that mail across, weather or no weather—for the mail must go.

Truth of the matter is, Mr. Googan was the instigator and forwarder of that air-mail slogan: "The Mail Must Go." And hadn't the press, from coast to coast, given him credit for it? You bet it had. And John A. liked that publicity. He ate it. He lived on it. Old fat and frothy John A. and Publicity were *just like that,* and the topmost, fattest finger was John A.

CHAPTER II

A LITTLE MAN

JUST as the air-mail pickup was quitting the highway for the air-mail turn-in, a taxi was making the turn-away, coming out. The cabbie gave the boys a wave, then pinched his nose with thumb and forefinger. He hooked a thumb back over his shoulder toward the hangar. The thumb and finger pinching nose was the airman's signal for fire—or for something that was stinking up the joint. One of the starting-crew macs said, "What the hell! What's eatin' that guy?" All aboard the pickup studied the hangar and field office alongside, and there was no sign of fire. The night watchman—he was driving the pickup—said, "She was all all right when I left. . . Naw, we ain't afire. The cabbie's screwy."

It wasn't fire. It was something that smelled, and it smelled from the first. It was a little man, a dressed-up little city feller, who was huddled in between the high hangar and the low office shack. Seeing him, the night watchman said, "He come in that cab. He wasn't here when I started for town. The little man that wasn't there. Lookit him! Is that baby blue-cold."

The night watchman unlocked the door of the field office, and there was a fire in there that he had been hugging all night. While the starting crew began to horse the hangar doors open, the watchman and Slim Collison invited the little man in to thaw his bones. The little man, for the time being, was too cold to talk.

This air-mail pilot even wore a six-gun on the hip.

The watchman said, "Fer Wyomin' this ain't cold, mister. Wait till the brass ones start freezin' off the monkeys, an' then them ain't castanets down in Mexico, they's your teeth, mister. You got business here with air mail? I ain't s'posed to entertain here in this office 'less ya have."

The little man, for the time being, was too cold to talk.

"My presence here is official," the little man said, and a wee bit of pomp was rising to the top. No doubt, after a real January thaw, this person might swell up to peak importance. Somehow or other, even to the watchman and Slim Collison, the guy looked that way. Slim was already busy with his pre-flight check-in report; and the Cheyenne telephone operator was trying to bring in the Rock Springs control for its weather promise. Not that Rock Springs ever had much to promise in the line of weather—except on the bad side.

At the word "official" the night watchman hesitated, then held his peace. He just stood there, looking across the hot stovetop, gazing down at the little man's still-chattering jaws. A little man who wasn't there half an hour ago might prove up to be Mr. Big long before noon. Government layouts were like that. Even the hangar roustabout might be a secret service dick, and that point had long since been proven—right there in Cheyenne. A man had to tread softly, for air mail was all loused up with queer supernumeraries, guys who came out of the walls and up through cracks in the floor, gents who didn't say a word but just came, took a look, then went—to be followed by hellish explosions in Personnel Office reports and actions. So the watchman finally said, "Yes, sir. Cold, ain't it? Ya musta almost freeze ya—"

The engine out on the line barked into life. Pilot Slim Collison, slowly pulling the open end of a full-fashioned, feminine silk stocking tightly over his head, and tucking the foot end in around his throat, stepped over to the window and watched his power unit make the warm-up run. That was his very heart ticking off the revs out there. That was his life-blood coursing through the oil leads under that long cowling. That was his spark of life sparking twenty-four plugs on twelve V-type hotpots. And well might the Collison man stand there, deadpan, and listen.

Jack Sands, the engine mac in the cockpit, brought her up to about 700 revs per minute, then slowly to 800. She was warming just right, and the small signs of cold-motor richness were leaving her exhaust fumes. Jack humped her over the 900 mark, then eased onto the 1000. She was sweet.

The little man, speaking to the night watchman, asked, "Is the pilot here yet?" just like that, and you could have knocked the watchman over with no effort at all. Even he knew a pilot when he saw one. He just raised a lazy hand toward Slim Collison. The little man stared that way—at the guy with the gun and the dirty coat and the chaps—and you just knew that he had expected a hoss.

"Pilot," he said, "I am—"

Slim Collison, slowly pulling his helmet over the silk stocking, whispered, "Sh-h-h," and nodded outward toward that warming

engine. Hell, this little man would yell in a cathedral! What the devil—butting in like that when a man was counting his own pulse, his own metallic heartbeat!

JACK SANDS, with his head low behind the open pit's windshield, palmed that throttle up toward 1200, then on to 1300. Half a minute more, and she took full-gun. Low in his pit now, with his eyes on the instrument-board, Jack Sands flicked his switches "L" and "R"—and she missed never a shot. Her oil pressure held. Her radiator temperature was right. She was turning 1600. Jack lifted his head into the slipstream and sniffed air on both sides of the pit, then he brought that throttle back and the roar of power fell away; and Wyoming was a quiet place again when the prop was just ticking over, with 300 on the tach.

Jack Sands caught Slim Collison's eye and gave him the high sign—*She's all yours.*

Slim flipped a wave, and there was beatification on his thin face. That was his ship out there. It was a DeHavilland-4, the fine workhorse which had put air mail from coast to coast; to hold it there against all opposition. That D.H.-4, as seen by Slim Collison, wasn't a crock. It wasn't a cull. It wasn't a flying coffin. A generation of bright aeronautical experts to come along later, and write expensive words in slick magazines, would say it was, but they hadn't been there in the cold in 1920, so they didn't know. But Slim Collison knew that D.H.-4 was sound, and its engine right; and he'd have told you that it was just about the best in the air. That Liberty-12, now idling under Jack Sands' able hand, was ready. It would bootstrap that thirty-six-hundred-pound D.H.-4 off a high-altitude field with one thousand pounds of mail sacks in its pit; and it would take that D.H. and load across four or five hundred miles of your United States and clear any of your mountain ranges in so doing. No, it wasn't a cull, nor a crock, nor a flying coffin, nor a death-trap. And Slim Collison rated himself a lucky boy to be flying a trim, long-snouted bus like that.

The little man, when the roar of motor died, once more began to say, "Pilot, I am—"

The phone rang. Slim picked up the receiver. Rock Springs' field manager was on the line talking, from his hotel room. He said, "Mornin', Collison. It ain't too bad. I can see the Table from my window. There's some cloud over her, but I'd say the sky ain't too bad. You can get through—with the usual luck." That was an accurate weather report, U. S. Air Mail, epoch 1920: a guy in his hotel room at Rock Springs was able to see the top of Table Mountains, half a dozen miles to the west.

Slim said, "Thanks. Be seeing you."

The U. S. Mail truck from the Cheyenne post office whirled up the drive and kicked snow when it slewed to a stop out there at the right wing's tip. Faster than scat, the starting crew tossed the pouches aboard the D.H.-4, and the mail driver barged into the office and told Collison to sign here.

"Where did you get it all?" Collison asked.

"Off the railroad," the post office driver said. "Do you think maybe we'd better give it back, or do you want to take it out and play with it between here and Rock Springs?"

"Never give anything to the railroad," Slim Collison said. "I heard we were hung up at North Platte yesterday."

"Up to the chin," said the post office man. "Omaha is snowed under too. She's hell on air, pilot, and this man Googan of yours is already raisin' the devil. Him and his long-distance phone calls! Hell, he gives more jack to the phone people than he spends on you air-mail guys."

"Ain't it the truth," Slim Collison mused. "Who's our fine, fat boss bothering now?"

"My boss," the Cheyenne man said. "Had him raggin' on the line just before I left the office. Know what, this Googan guy insisted we bring this out to you. My boss was for putting it back into the loving hands of the good old Union Pacific."

"Your boss is trying to raise a wen on his own nose," Collison said. "When she's marked air mail it means air mail, and between here and Rock Springs she'll go by air if we have to get down on the range and taxi. But I'm overdue. Tell your boss—"

"Mr. Pilot! Pilot, I am—"

"Just a shake," Collison said. The

phone was ringing. "Air mail, Cheyenne. Collison speaking, the clerk isn't here," the ready pilot said. "Oh, hello, *Mr.* Googan. Good morning, *Mr.* Googan."

After that, for a full three or four minutes, Collison listened to Mr. John A. Googan shoot the breeze via long distance all the way from Frisco. The hefty boss was working for the phone company again. And apparently working a night shift at it.

"That's right, *Mr.* Googan," Slim Collison finally said. "We have the mail aboard and I'm all set to shove off. Yes, sir, the boys and I went down to the railroad and fought the iron-horsemen for this cargo. We fought the postmaster too. Them there guys ain't our friends, *Mr.* Googan. Never mind the lingo, I'm all set to ride: gun, chaps, fishline, bowie knife and everything, even high boots in case I get forced down in sheep country. You ever been in sheep country, *Mr.* Googan?"

SLIM COLLISON would sooner have been conversing with a ragged-tailed sheepherder any time, but he listened again for a few minutes longer while Mr. John A. Googan ran up the bill and added mystery or something to the morning's doings.

"A Mr. Pool, you say?" Collison asked. "Why just a shake, *Mr.* Googan while I look around," and Slim eyed the little man.

"I'm Mr. Pool," the little man said. "I've been try—"

"Why the devil didn't you say so?" Collison demanded. "Mr. John A. Googan wants to know if you showed up. . .

"Yes, he's here, *Mr.* Googan. Right here, big as life, in the Cheyenne office. . . Do what, *Mr.* Googan? But, *Mr.* Googan, I have a cargo of mail aboard. Give some of it back to the Union Pacific? Not by a damned site, *Mr.* Googan! *Mr.* Googan, your slogan is: *The Mail Must Go—And To Hell With The Pilots.* And my motto is: *Take It Away—From the Railroad.* But, *Mr.* Googan, why is it necessary for Mr. Pool to deadhead west? After all, this is air mail, not a passenger service."

John A. Googan was making Tel & Tel happy some more; and little Mr. Pool was pulling a paper from an inner pocket.

"Your guest, *Mr.* Googan? But my responsibility, eh? Public-relations contact, eh? Good for air mail? Not so good if the press begins to headline: Air Mail Passenger Overdue at Rock Springs. It could happen, *Mr.* Googan. This is winter. Or is it winter out there where the sun hits on both sides of the fence all year round? You should see us this morning, *Mr.* Googan. My hoss has an icicle a yard long on his lower lip. And you should see Mr. Pool, here in this warm office. His teeth are still chattering so loud that I can hardly hear that operator cutting in to tell you that the air-mail funds are falling fast. Even if I get your Mr. Pool aboard, *Mr.* Googan, I'm afraid the Rock Springs boys will pull him out of that pit stiff as a wedding collar. Two or three hours over the Laramies can be hell without heat."

When Mr. John A. Googan bellowed, "You have your orders, Collison!" even the night watchman ducked, for the voice made that mere 950 miles absolutely without benefit of telephone line, and there was no charge. "You see that he gets through to Rock Springs! And tell Rock Springs to put him into the Lake before tonight!"

"Into the Lake, *Mr.* Googan? O-o-o, what you suggest! Scott is on that hop, and Scott is a very literal fellow. He might do it, *Mr.* Googan. I'll tell him. And good day to you, *Mr.* Googan."

Hanging up, Slim Collison turned to Mr. Pool and the watchman and said, "That was *Mr.* Googan. *Mr.* John A. Googan. I don't know what the 'A' stands for, but I have a good idea, and, brother, it ain't nice. It ain't polite.

"So you want a ride, Mr. Pool? You have the authority?"

"This paper," Mr. Pool said, presenting the official-looking sheet. "It is from the Washington office. It gives me the privilege of riding air mail from coast to coast. I, Mr. Pilot, represent the National Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce. We are making a survey of air commerce possibilities."

"You'll freeze your donnickers in that open pit," Slim Collison said. "There's no windshield, you know. Take a look."

"I rode open pits as far as North Platte," Mr. Pool stated. "I came in there yesterday afternoon with this mail you now have aboard. I rode the night train up from North Platte with that mail."

"You and this cargo of mail must be like that," Slim Collison said. "Well, how about flying duds?"

"The boys at each control have been equipping me," Mr. Pool said. "They've been fitting me out with spare duds. They've been very considerate. Of course, I left all equipment at North Platte, so that it could be shipped back to Omaha."

Slim Collison said, "My flying schedule is all shot to hell, what with waiting for the post office to get the stuff out, then gassing with old John A., so what's another lost hour or two," and, so saying, he began opening pilots' lockers and digging out duds—old fur-lined teddybear coveralls here, a helmet there, fleece-lined elephant boots from a third, then helmet, goggles and even a pair of gloves. "Never let it be said that the Pacific Division wasn't very considerate of a guest," he growled, "even if it is going to please our Mr. Googan. . . I'd give a right arm, with my own big heart clasped in the hand, just to get Mr. Googan off the ground, on a day like this, feeling as I do now—sore as a bear with a foot of Indian arrow in its butt. O.K., Mr. Pool, get into 'em, by the count, and we'll see what can be done toward making a chilly survey for the National Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce."

THE night watchman aided and abetted Mr. Pool in his effort to assume the stature of an airman. Doing so, he lost the little man in that teddybear flying suit, for the rightful owner had been mighty, six foot three Tex Gunther, long since gone from air mail via the he-hit-a-mountain route. The boots also belonged to a big man, Charlie Raft; and Mr. Pool could turn around in them without making more than one set of tracks in the snow. As for the helmet, it belonged to the biggest head in air mail, that of Chief Mechanic Joe Bull. On Mr. Pool it looked

"So you want a ride, Mr. Pool?" Collison asked. "You have the authority?"

like an ancient casque helmet, without padding, and if they struck bad weather he'd have a snow drift in each ear. In short, as an aviator, Mr. Pool of the National Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce looked like holy hell. Coming out to the line, Slim Collison could see that the starting crew wanted to laugh. When Jack Sands climbed down and passed close, Slim said, "He's setting aviation back twenty-five years. But get into the pit. . . Sure we'll have to leave the top cowl behind. . . Hey, what the devil! He's lugging two bags!"

Mr. Pool had left his two bags between the hangar and the office upon arriving via taxi. But now the teddy bear was waddling plane-ward between those two bags. And fine fat bags they were.

"Just a moment, Mr. Pool," Collison said. "How about the boys shipping those bags by railroad express?"

"Oh, no, pilot," the little man said. "They're my records, and books, etcetera. They ride with me. I'm talking in Salt Lake City. They've been aboard with me all the way. We'll manage. . . Give me a hand, gentlemen."

"Hold it. Hold it," Collison objected. "I don't know about this. Carrying a deadhead is one thing, and bad enough, but this thing of taking express matter from the Union Pacific is something else again. Not to mention the fact that it could be the straw that would bust the old cammule's back. We're overloaded with you, Mr. Pool, and there's a danger of picking up an ice load along the line. I'll have to object. No bags, crew!"

Mr. Pool began poking inward through his layers of pelt, like an angry bruin getting at that wood tick. He was reaching for that official pass. He said, "You didn't read my authorization, pilot. It's all there. This is an important survey. My bags are important. . . There, read it. Right there!"

It was there, and no damned foolin'. Slim Collison held up air mail long enough to take a good look at that official paper. After the good look, he was firmly of the opinion that he, and air mail, were working for Mr. Leeland Marion Pool. Angry as the very devil, Collison forthwith forgot most of the reading matter, but the "Marion" item remained to befuddle him. It intrigued him. Somehow or other, instinct and the background of a gentleman warned him that a Collison should, at least, be polite to a man named Marion.

"You win," he said. "Heave-ho on the bags, crew. And give Mr. Pool a leg-up, too. How long are we going to hold up air mail? Haven't you men ever heard Mr. Googan say: The Mail Must Go?"

"Sure," Jack Sands answered. "But he didn't say where."

"Over the hills and far away," Pilot Slim Collison said, climbing aboard, then cinching up his safety, and settling down in that open cockpit for the long haul westward. "Pull 'em when you're ready! And hey, Mr. Pool, don't give away any of those mail pouches. I'm signed up for them, and there's no samples. Hang on!"

CHAPTER III

MAN MISSING

THE sun was high rearward over the tail service. Out front the Laramie Range had lost all its big-rock-candy glitter; and there was no color save that of cold winter, just the white of snows and the black-green of the below-timberline verdure. Here and there—off toward where they were going—low clouds lost from the higher pack were right down on the peaks. Down where Buford should be, only twenty miles out of Cheyenne, there was no Buford, but just a solid cloudpack; and that's where the Union Pacific really decides to go through the Laramie Range. But Slim Collison was no flyer-of-railroads. Hitherto, Buford had merely marked the place where he began to get the despised Union Pacific out of his sight. Once over the hump, the railroad threw a big loop north and west. Lesser men—such as Army Air Force and Navy flyers—were known to go where the steel went, but not Slim Collison. Beyond that hump, he was on his own. And by the time the Medicine Bow Range threw up its highest challenge, and gave him its lowest high pass, some sixty miles on his way, he was right down on the mountainside, with the cloud blanket resting on either shoulder of the canyon, and him and the good D.H.-4 carrying Mr. Pool through a sunless skyhigh tunnel; and it was no tunnel of love. Things could happen, and if they did, it would all be bad.

Mr. Pool, sitting on one of his own bags, had his back to the sheet-metal firewall which separated mail pit and engine-bay. Mr. Pool's second bag was in his lap; and the mail pouches were tucked in around and over him, almost up to his chin. The crown of his loose helmet just topped the firewall's upper rim, and Slim Collison watched the slipstream's icy blast ripple and worry the leather headpiece. So the two men sat facing each other. It wasn't the usual position for a deadhead, but Jack Sands had made the arrangement with malice aforethought. He was ribbing Collison. He had told other members of the starting crew, "Slim'll do a slow burn all the way to the Springs if he has to look ahead and face this guy all the way. That slow burn'll keep Slim warm. You guys know how he is with Washington favorites: he'd rather have a smelly Indian buck, a guy with just 'Ugh,' and 'How.'"

And it was wearing Slim Collison down. Mr. Pool never seemed to remove his gaze from the pilot's face. "Hell's bells," Slim speculated, "maybe the little gent is one of these Government nut doctors. Maybe I'm under observation." However, when they went into that dark cloud tunnel that led westward across Medicine Bow Range, Mr. Pool glanced up, overside, then down—and the *up* was just a low-hanging drape of frayed-out cloud-bank, while the *down* was right there—a very tough-looking mountainside so close that a real long-legged passenger might shove a foot through the floorboards and drag a shoe through the snow. Mr. Pool appeared impressed. He should have been. He was where the *men* went.

Coming to the west end of that tunnel, Slim Collison would barge out across the upper reaches of the North Platte River. He didn't have to think of thermal rises today, nor of the lethal opposite—down-drafts—for the valley, like the high ranges, would be without anything resembling heat. But what he got, Slim Collison hardly expected—a shove on the nose. It was a hellish punch in the beezer. It was like a hand picking up a mittful of loose clouds, then slapping them in your face, at the same time pushing you up and back. The D.H.-4 had bruted its way into a wind. It was a wind out of the west. A big blow that was sweeping the North Platte's range land and shoving all clouds before it. Hardly had the ship won clear of the Medicine Bow tops before it bolted into a cloudless blue sky. Slim looked ahead to the bleak crests of the Sierra Madre, a good fifty miles away, and they seemed close enough to touch. Mr. Pool, seeing clear skies, smiled. "Don't smile at me, Marion," the pilot mumbled to himself. "You damned little bad-luck charm, you don't know a headwind from a kick in the tail."

Well, there was one thing you did when a headwind bopped you on the nose: you dug up a deck of cigs, pulled down into the office and lit up. So doing, Slim Collison let down with the fall of the Medicine Bow west slope, for Slim was a man who had no use for altitude. After all, land is the thing you've got to watch, for, up till then, few flying guys had died in the sky, and, anyway, when you've seen one sky you've seen 'em all. So he went right down to the range. When a steer on a knoll stood on its fore legs and kicked up at the passing plane with its aft hooves, he knew he was low enough. So he leveled off—then pulled down behind the windshield and retired for a smoke.

MR. POOL saw the head go down. Mr. Pool waited through what seemed like an age but the head didn't come up. Mr. Pool knew enough to become worried. In due course of time. Mr. Pool knew enough to become panicky. Mr. Pool was no seer, no looker-into-the-future, and he had never heard of any robot developments—back there in 1920. He knew you had to fly 'em, that you'd better fly 'em, and that the damned things, left to their own wiles, didn't care where they piled up, or how soon. So Mr. Pool began to yell. It took a very good yell to reach back through that brief stretch of five or six feet—above a Liberty's roar—but the little man had the lungs. Slim Collison, glancing overside across the lowest curve of his portside gunnel, heard the yell, smiled, then went a little deeper and chained up a second cig. If the little guy was a nut doctor maybe Slim, in his own quiet way, could drive him nuts; and there'd be some sort of justifiable retribution in the switch. They'd send out Washington guys to snoop on air mail, would they!

Meantime, Mr. Pool's heart stood still—by the long minute—for he thought he saw smoke coming out of that rear pit.

Forgetting Mr. Pool, Slim Collison went into his third cig, all the time keeping an eye overside—mostly aft across that low curve of the gunnel. He saw other steers kick up at his passing. He had taught all those wild hellers how to stand on their front feet and belt out at passing ships with their rear kickers. But the range and the hooves-up stock were just dragging past; and that damned headwind had the good D.H.-4 slowed down to a stagger. Finally, he saw Jack Creek go aft below. Now he'd have to pull up a bit and clear the northernmost hump of the Sierra Madre. A quarter hour later, atop the high spot, he checked his time. He was an hour and twenty minutes out of Cheyenne, and one hundred miles airline. He should have knocked that down in about forty-five minutes. Yes, she was one hell of a blow on the nose.

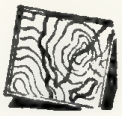
Hardly more than halfway to Rock Springs! Half the first pack of cigs was gone. The snows on the ridges ahead and to the north—off toward where the Union Pacific was throwing that wide loop to the north and west—were scudding eastward like blown fleece. Wind. Wind everywhere. Wind that had the range cleared bare for miles at a stretch. Table Rock Butte, thirty-five miles out front, stood above the feathery spindrift, high, alone and icy. It was the thing to fly on, but it sure stood off today.

Slim Collison guessed that the wind was getting worse, for he was into his second pack of smokes before the butte went aft. From Table Rock he should have brought Rock Springs into view, for the control is only thirty miles west of the big thumb. But he could only pick up the lower levels of the Aspen Mountains, about midway of the distance. The upper levels of the range were under clouds; and, by hell, they were sure-nuff storm clouds.

For a long time then, the D.H.-4 stood still. Telling about it later, Slim Collison said she flew backwards while he dragged out two full packs of cigs; and he was a man who wouldn't lie—much. Anyway, the third full hour of flight was drawing to a close when he pushed into the black wall that was a storm over the Aspens. Of course, that aforementioned lesser man might have skirted north and around the range. But if Slim Collison did that—and God forbid—he'd come smack-dab on the hated Union Pacific. And would he do that—and follow the rails into town?—the hell you tell!

CHAPTER IV

SERVICE STOP



MR. POOL, screwing his frozen neck counter-clockwise ever so slightly, caught signs of railroad tracks off there to the north. Then he noticed the outer ravelings of what should be a town passing by. He asked the good God in heaven to make it Rock Springs. It was. Presently—once more chancing the fate of his eyes on a peek at that cockpit—he saw Slim Collison's head come up into the inverted V of the windshield; and that long-missing worthy was pointing down ahead and framing the lip talk which said: *Rock Springs.* Then the D.H.-4 roared a slow creep dead-ahead into the teeth of the blow, the Rock Springs field crew reached up and grabbed wing- and tail-skids, Slim cut his power; and they were down to a bumping-good landing. Forthwith, Slim Collison slid overside and borrowed a cig. He said she'd been one large-size hop, "Three hours and twenty minutes for an hour-and-a-half run!"

Quickly, the field crew snubbed the D.H. to a five-ton truck, right there at midfield, lest she become a boxkite and blow back into the air. Just as quickly, a pickup truck from the Rock Springs post office whirled out from the vicinity of the field office and pulled in close to the ship.

"Hey! Hey! Hold Everything! What goes here?" Collison began to yell.

"The mail," said the field manager. "She'll get aboard that noon westbound choo-choo if we get the rag out."

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute," Slim Collison warned. "This is air mail. She's all stamped that way. And that's the way she goes."

The field manager hooked a thumb toward the hangar. He said, "Does she look like it, Slim?" The big doors were closed. There was no sign of a warming, waiting relay ship—Scott's ship—either out on the

line nor through the side windows of the hangar. "Everything's washed out. The Lake's snowed under. The railroad dispatchers say no visibility anywhere—Green River, Granger, Evanston, Coalville—and Salt Lake ain't expecting you."

For the first time, the hunched and humped field crew began to see Mr. Pool. "Fer the love of Pete!" somebody explained. "Frozen Santa Claus—junior size! What you got here, Slim?"

"A special messenger," Collison declared. "Oh, Mr. Pool! Mr. Pool, step down and meet the Rock Springs hothouse flowers. . .

"Now listen, my sheltered friends. Mr. Pool is a very important guest of the Washington office. His paper comes from the Postoffice General, with Stanton's O.K., plus Mr. John A. Googan's telephoned blessing. John A. had me on the phone just before I pulled out of Cheyenne. Do you know what he said?"

"The mail must go!" the chorus sang out. "What the hell else could that old windbag say!"

"That's right," Slim agreed. "But he also said that Mr. Pool must go. Mr. Pool must be in the Lake by evening."

"In the Lake," the field manager repeated. "Gang, did you hear that—Mr. Pool in the Lake, and Slim with him? Is this pee-lot askin' for it!"

"Where's Scott?" Collison asked.

"Sick with the flu, and in bed," the field manager said.

"Any other pilot here in town?"

"No, Page was due in from the Lake yesterday, but no soap. They washed out the hop. Why don't you ride into town and get drunk, Slim?"

"I like the stuff they have in Salt Lake better," Collison answered. "Roll out Scott's ship."

"She's under work," Slattery, the chief mac, said. "We have the prop pulled and the radiator off. No dice, Slim."

"Work this bus in to the pump and fill her up," Slim Collison ordered. "I'm going over the hump. We're handing no air mail over to the Union Pacific. Come on, let's hump. . . Hey, Mr. Pool, crawl out and stretch a leg."

"You can't do it, Slim," the field manager was saying. "I had orders to wash out all flights, east and west. There'd be hell to pay if I let you make the Lake run."

"You're not letting me do anything," Collison said. "Hey, post office, get the hell back to town. You're late for lunch as it is. What do you want to do, have the old woman raising the devil with you? . . . . You husbands!" But the post office driver just sat tight. He had spent months taking mail pouches out to this field, then taking lots of them right back to the railroad station. You couldn't tell him that air mail was here to stay.

That damned headwind had the good D.H.-4 slowed down to a stagger.

WITH Slim Collison doing most of the work, and the field manager laboring for bigger and better excuses, the five-ton truck put a tow-line on the landing-gear fittings, then the D.H.-4 went in toward the fuel pump. It was a tough against-wind haul.

"Googan'll eat your tail out for issuing your own flyin' orders," the field manager reminded Collison. "He'll can you."

"Nuts!" said Collison. "Give the old fathead a buzz, ring Frisco, he'll tell you to clear me."

"Fat chance," said the F.M. "Both telephone and telegraph are out between here and the Lake. They went dead an hour ago. Man, I tell you she's a washout from coast to coast. You're one first-rate damn fool, Slim. . . Sure, that fathead Googan'd give you clearance. The Mail Must Go, sez he. What he means is: Let The Mail Go To Hell. He wants you guys to fly—into the ground. You know what we all know—that good old John A. is hand-in-mitt with the railroads, with Wall Street; and the sure way to kill air mail is to take it out—in weather like this—and bash its bloody brains out against the nearest mountain. . . The Mail Must Go!"

"Now you're talking," Slim Collison enthused, and the field crew was just beginning to hand-wind fuel. "You're working for Googan and the railroads every time you hand back a pouch of mail. Wash her out from coast to coast today, and by hell the rail tycoons'll be dancing on their mahogany desks from New York, through Chicago, in K.C., and west to Frisco. Let's give them something to worry about, feller. Let's leave one bright spot on the air-mail map. Let Rock Springs stand—and burn its mark on their sodden souls—as a flaming torch of advancement."

"Hear the man talk!" Chief Mac Slattery kidded. "Fine woids is what you have, Mr. Collison. You eddicated son, you."

"The world," Slim Collison said, "will little note nor long remember any words I might say here, but, by hell, the guys with burrs in their brush and ticks in their trousers are going to remember that a guy named Collison flew here—on this division, where God piled his world so high, and a man could reach for the stars. . . Hold it!—that tank's running over. . . Oh, well, that's the way you can tell when it's full. . . Hey, how you boys on the oil side? Full-up, eh? Good. . . Now let me get a look at Scott's altimeter reading—on his Lake set. Nobody monkeyed with it since Scott came in?"

The chief mac said no, that nobody had re-set Scott's altimeter. That was important. That instrument was set to Salt Lake's altitude. Collison's, of course, had a Cheyenne set. When the variation had been corrected, Slim Collison said he was ready to shove off. Hold up for grub—even for a shot of java? No, no, that could wait. They had better grub and java in Salt Lake City. Even Mr. Pool agreed with that. He was all for getting on. Truth is, the little man was in a hurry. So he crawled back among his bags and pouches, once more disappearing down to the chin; and it was the field manager who said, "Damned if you don't like flyin', Collison—when you'll sit out two long hops looking at a face like that! Well, it's all yours, but don't forget to remember that I told you to stay on the ground." He gazed off to the west, and there was little to be seen off there. He continued, "We picked you off the Table once, but, by hell, if you smack it today, you'll stay smacked. How the hell, man, do you expect to get through that sky? Take a look at it."

"Beautiful," Collison said, taking a look. "Now how about it, gang—any of you boys feel like donating packs of cigs to the cause? . . . Thanks, chief. You bet, Slat, half a deck's better than no deck at all. . . What, a brand-new pack, Mac? Why, you first-grade saint, I'll remember you in my will," and, as before Slim Collison began stowing packs and half packs where a man would know where they were, where a man could reach them with ease. Bug-eyed, Mr. Pool gazed overside and watched. For the first time, no doubt, he began to understand the why and wherefore of the smoke that he had seen coming from the rear pit.

In a very flat voice, the field manager said, "The world's supreme optimist, gentlemen. That he should live long enough to smoke all those cigs!"

"Railroadman!" said Collison. "Wall Street underling!"

"Are you going down through the hole?" the field manager asked, meaning was Collison going to fly the usual air-mail hop down through that piled-up hell which offers nothing but mountains from Evanston to Salt Lake City.

"No, I'm going to make a dog-leg of it," Collison said. "I'll take 'er due west to the lake, hit at about Brigham, then south across the water and sneak in by the back door. That's about 220 miles; but I'll have a sidewind on the southbound leg."

"And a sore damn leg from carrying fifty or sixty miles of right rudder," said the field manager. "Oh, well, she's your party."

"And you're not even invited," said Slim Collison, "but you're a nice guy, in your way, so get out of the way and let the hired help launch a ship. Shucks, man, you'll boast about this day. The day when the iron horse lost a shoe, and Mr. Collison and Mr. Pool carried on with their survey and put new pinions in the air-mail wing."

CHAPTER V

HE WENT THAT WAY

WITH all hands either dangling from strut fittings or sitting atop the stabilizer, the D.H.-4 went downwind to the east end of the field. Its engine was turning at idle, but there was no need of that taxi power. Finally, with manpower and Liberty power, Slim Collison worked it around and headed back into the blow. Then, with all human anchors still in place—and all eyes of those anchors on him—he waited for a lull in the hurricane, just for the least bit of a lull, merely for a moment when the long wind sock atop the hangar wouldn't be fat-full, horizontal and whipping itself to death. He saw the moment coming. His right hand came down. His left hand shot full throttle to the Liberty. She yelled with rage. The anchors fell away. The ship was off the ground—without a run—and ballooning. Her flight direction was west, but it looked like an exhibition of hovering. The field crew was seeing something, and that Rock Springs gang had seen many strange things before. Yet they froze there, and forgot the cold. Forgot self, everything, for they were watching a man at work. And when the man at work passed his ship over the hangar, he had fully five hundred feet of altitude under him. He was flying either a kite or an elevator. But he was on his way.

Slim Collison had the Union Pacific tracks and the Green River valley as far as Granger, though he tried his honest best not to look at steel, at the same time thanking God for valleys. At Granger he allowed the railroad to give southward, then he and the valley went into man's country, bravely and very much alone. It was going to be a long hard haul; and already Mr. Pool was watching wisps of smoke whip themselves from behind a windshield where there should have been a pilot's face on constant display. It was all very disconcerting for the little man. Maybe he'd mention it in his final survey report. Perhaps Washington would do something about off-duty pilots.

At times the ground contact was fair. When Slim Collison figured it was time to pick up the range which is Bear River Divide, sure enough she was there. He skimmed lowly across that hump, then went down across Bear River Valley, and, after another long drag, saw the lake of the same name passing on his right—out across the low part of that rightside gunnel. He was getting pretty well along into his assorted borrowed cigs. As a rule, he didn't like to mix brands. After all, he wasn't running one of those smoke tests. Air mail was his business, the advancement of air mail and the utter defeat of all mail-carrying railroads.

Two full hours of heart-breaking drudgery had passed when Slim Collison sighted high Monte Christo. It was at a time when visibility, and ground contact, were beginning to go back to the very-bad side. He thanked the Lord for Monte Christo. It was the eastern point of an almost perfect triangle, with Brigham the north angle and Ogden the south. Slim Collison decided to make his smell for Ogden. Brigham, only 6000 population, was really too small for a smell. But any city of forty thousand sends its own individual reek verily to the high heavens. For example, it's that fishy aroma through the fogs above Boston, stockyard stink where Chicago or K. C. lie under the blanket. The wheat processing plants at Omaha. Smog above Los Angeles. The soap factories waft their scent through the Frisco overcast and shame that Golden Gate. And it is the general railroad-town bouquet where and when Ogden hides under the blanket. Slim Collison knew that he would be able to smell out Ogden if and when, and sure enough, he did; for the busy city sends up a fine burnt offering of its low-grade soft-coal smoke for all who fly and sniff. So Slim sniffed, and because visibility was zero zero, he gave the west-

ward run another few minutes—till the salt smell replaced the Ogden brand—then turned his course due south. Right away, as expected, he went onto hard right rudder; and air mail was in a solid cloud-pack on the last leg of the hop.

It's only thirty-five miles from Ogden down to the holy city; and even going out wide on the lake—to sneak in by the back door—you'd hardly boost the distance to fifty miles. Taking the chance that he was already south of the Southern Pacific cutoff, Slim Collison put his left eye on the altimeter, his right eye over the gunnel, then began to let down. He had smelled out Ogden at 6000 feet above what Scott's adjustment said was Salt Lake's "O"—and if his altimeter was right, then he had a long way to drop, and maybe he'd find clear going closer to the water. So he saw 5000, 3000, 2000 and 500 come under the falling indicator finger. And when she drops to 500 feet, a man begins to pay attention. Slim Collison did. He leveled off, then began to let her down as she ran—elevator style, flat as a hat; and 400, then 300 came to the dial. He glanced at his time, and he was advised that two hours and thirty-five minutes had been spent between Rock Springs and his present point on a very indefinite map. He wondered exactly where that point might be, oh not *exactly* but he wished he had something more definite than "300 feet above somewhere."

NOW, coming down on the target—whatever the target might be—300 feet of altitude wasn't an inch too much. There are all those high rock islands down there at the southeast end of the lake—large Stanbury, larger Antelope, to say nothing of lesser fry that were still high enough and tough enough to be classed as anything but minor obstructions. Onshore, he must keep Saltair Beach and its acres of gingerbread bathing-house, pavilion, etc., in mind; and said amusement properties stand high above the water. Then there were the great smelteries slightly inshore at Garfield, Smelter, Garfield Smelter and Lake Point; and as for the twelve miles of salt flats between the lake, the city and the Jordan—where was the air-mail field, somewhere—well that was all loused up with mechanical salt pilers—things with long, high booms—tractors at work, high-tension masts, and all the other tall things of which industry is capable. Flat as the salt flats are, you don't go in for a landing there unless you have some faint idea where "there" might be, at the time. And Slim Collison was none too certain that Scott had taken care to re-set and adjust his Salt Lake "O" at any time during the last few months. After all, a pilot reaches a place where he holds the home port in contempt. That is, he takes it for granted that he can go in there with his eyes closed, and without instruments. For instance, Slim Collison was aware of the fact that he hadn't checked his own Cheyenne set during the last long hell of a time. And he could have put a curse on Slim Collison for the neglect. What the devil were altimeters for, if not for use! What if some guys did argue that they were no good above ten thousand feet, while other guys would give you odds that the best of them weren't accurate *under* ten thousand feet?

Slim Collison reached a place on his watch where he knew he was going to run out of lake if he held to the southeastward push. And at the same time, he was on his last cig, which was the very worst sort of news. He didn't dare turn inland for the reasons just stated. He had enough fuel for another half-hour's flight. He could swing west and run chances of finding the Great-Salt-Desert side of the lake in the clear. It often happened that storms covering the east shore were having very little to do with that western barren. However, with the wind out of the west, there wasn't much promise. Still and all, that storm-blanketed Salt Lake City area offered absolutely no promise. So he lay 'er over in a stiff right bank—scaring the devil out of little Mr. Pool—wheeled on the tip of that low right wing, then lifted 'er back to level and cut for the west. He gave it a good twenty minutes, and when the strong salt smell began to go out of his head, he guessed that he was off the lake and above the desert. He pulled up a bit to avoid contact with the Lakeside Mountains, then gave way slowly to the north. No dice. There were no breaks in the clouds. There was nothing but four wings and a silver-gray disc that showed where a good old Liberty stick was still turning its 1600 revs per.

But that good old Liberty stick was going to stop turning within the quarter hour. When the fuel gauge lowers its finger into the red and points to "empty," it means almost empty, and it's neither a threat nor a boast, but just an honest warning. Slim Collison had been thus warned so many times that he believed implicitly in the mechanical veracity of devices which never gave quarter to any man, high or low. Well, his destination had been Air Mail Field, Salt Lake City, and by the beard of the Prophet, that was still his destination!

So he wore away, putting the wind on his tail and his nose on the "E"—and thus began to bring the destination closer, and yet closer, with the speed of the wind, and little else; for he had his engine throttled very low. Once more, he was dropping the slight altitude won on the west desert. With more time, and more fuel, he might have tried smelling out Salt Lake City. Oh, she's no flower. She has that good old smelter aroma down around the south shore. And she has that beet-sugar perfume overcoming the salt tang now and then, here and there. She even sends up a textile-city staleness that would do credit to Lowell or Lawrence, Mass.

However, Slim Collison, giving it a last thought, knew that he would have to get downwind, far inland over the city, in order to line up the smells. Then let down through them, and for what! He'd still have no visibility, and man does not live by smell alone. At least, not flying men. No, that good old smell route would lead to nowhere, and—tough as it was to face it—it was out.

The fuel-gauge indicator was now hard against the bottom pin; and one swell Liberty was doing its honest best to suck fumes off the sides of the gas tank and fuel lines. But there's only so much "bootstrap" gasoline in any tank, and Collison's was gone.

WHEN he told about it later, Slim Collison said he thought of several things during the last minute, and the items were in correct chronological order; though, for the first time, he questioned whether or not the altruistic effort had been worth the try—and deserving of the horrible finish. But, first, he thought of the railroads, and the fact that they still had to fight to get air-mail matter away from a guy named Collison. Next, in quick, flashing order, he thought of John A., The Mail Must Go, and the fact that John A. really hoped that the air mail wouldn't. Then there was the little man who wasn't there, but who now sat so chilly and bewildered right there in his mail pit—with that glazed stare on his face. Mr. Pool, the little man connected with the big-sounding National Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, doing a survey, trying to learn whether or not wings could do it. Then, as one of his very last pre-finish thoughts, Collison recalled Mr. John A. Googan's final, fated, shouted words: ". . . put him in the Lake before night!" Yes, sir, those were Mr. Googan's last words; and, by George, that was exactly what Pilot Slim Collison was going to do to, and for, little Mr. Pool.

He made as close a guess as he could, and, with two hundred feet reading on the altimeter, flew a final turn and brought his nose around into the wind, full power on the engine, and all sails a-quiver. This was it! This guess was that he was somewhere above the big salt flat—between the Lake and the fine city—and that his final landing glide would end just offshore.

Then—praying for just one more minute of fuel—he stood on his rudder-bar, pulled himself as far forward as possible, with his chin out over the windshield, and yelled, "Oh, Pool! When I give you the next yell—d'ya hear me?—pull one of those pouches into your face! . . A pouch! Into your face!"

Mr. Pool had heard. He sat bolt-upright. Surprise and other expressions swept over his face, and, no doubt, fear was among the manifestations. The important thing is that he did sit high. Slim Collison noticed the slight uprising, and he said it was God working in his wondrous way in behalf of one Collison. And when Mr. Pool stiffened with surprise and other things, the crown of his helmeted head went three or four inches above the top of the cowling's bow—right up into the cold slipstream. But Mr. Pool wasn't thinking of the cold. . . A pouch! Into your face!

Then the seagulls began coming. Slim Collison felt the thud and saw the one

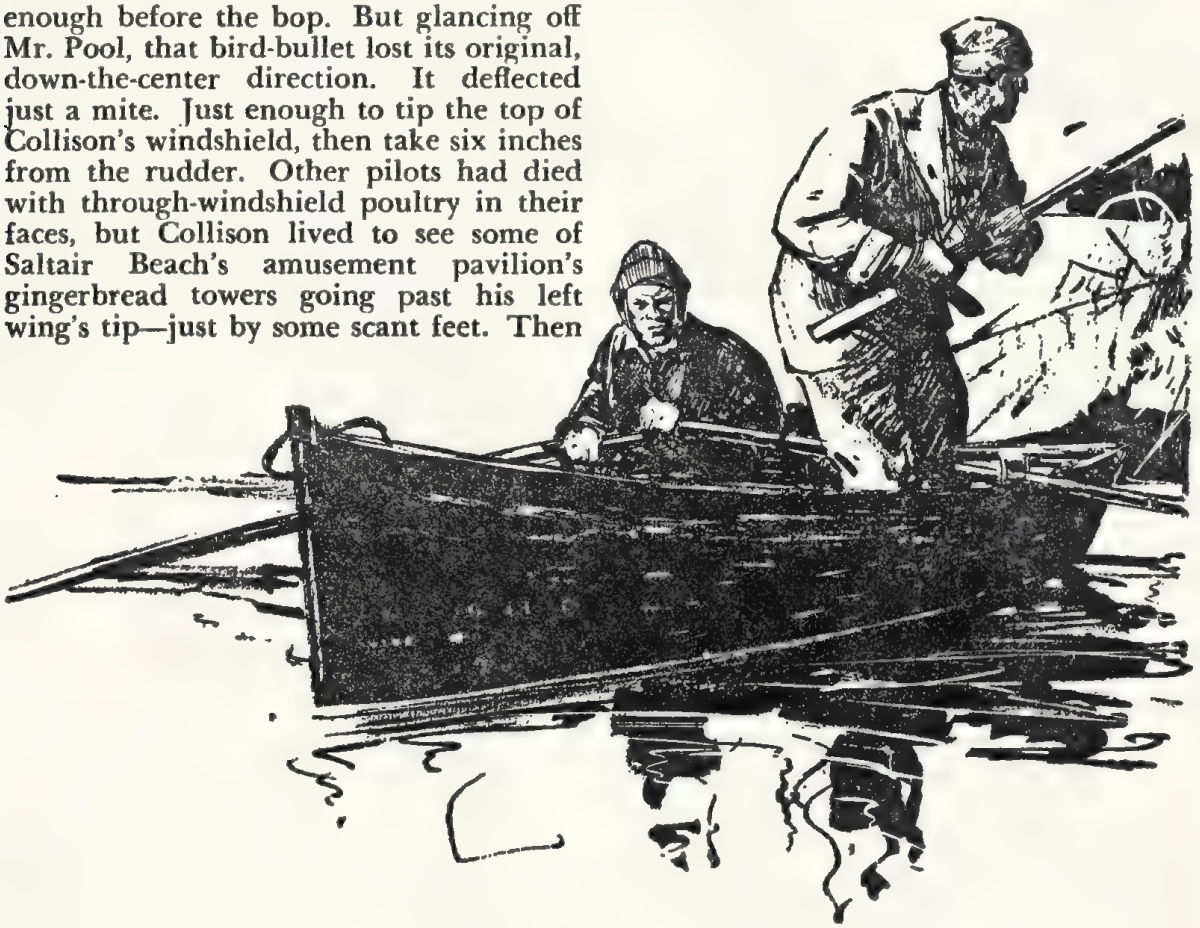
which spread its remains against the base fitting of the outer right-front strut. And he saw the one which scattered its feathers aft when it hung up on the flying-wires of the left inner bay. Also, he saw one or two others slithering aft between wings. However, he was very lucky in that he also lived to see the one which came directly through the propeller. That gull came through—apparently without prop damage—about three feet above the boss. It left a few feathers on the radiator's filler cap. Then, at perhaps one hundred miles per hour, that weight of big bird went tailward and clipped Mr. Pool on the high head. It clipped him a side glance, and it knocked him cold—not that he wasn't cold enough before the bop. But glancing off Mr. Pool, that bird-bullet lost its original, down-the-center direction. It deflected just a mite. Just enough to tip the top of Collison's windshield, then take six inches from the rudder. Other pilots had died with through-windshield poultry in their faces, but Collison lived to see some of Saltair Beach's amusement pavilion's gingerbread towers going past his left wing's tip—just by some scant feet. Then he cut his switch and flattened 'er out. Next half minute he was pushing a devil of a bow wave; and then she was settling.

That D.H.-4 had balloon tires and an empty fuel tank, and she herself was all wood and surface linen. It was all good floatage, but Slim Collison hopped to it in his effort to get the mail pouches atop the upper wings. So doing, he removed Mr. Pool. A dash of water had revived Mr. Pool just a mite. Slim Collison heaved the little man up on the center section and yelled, "Hold on!" Then he went under again and tried for the last few sacks and Mr. Pool's bags. But Mr. Pool had lost his grip and rolled into the lake. He had one hand clasping the trailing edge of the left upper panel. He was wheezing, "I can't swim! I can't swim!"

"Lucky you," Slim Collison laughed. "You, coming two thousand miles to fall in a lake where you can't sink. Hold on, but sing out if you drift. . . Hey, Mr. Pool, here comes a rowboat. Boy oh boy, do we get the breaks!"

The boat was manned by a piledriver crew doing winter repair work on the amusement pier. They said that the D.H.-4, making its last turn back into the wind, had flushed those seagulls from the roofs of that gingerbread establishment, and that the landing wheels had all but left tracks through the snows on those same roofs, so low was air mail's passage.

"I was just trying to place you men," Slim Collison said. "Give me a hand with



Mr. Pool had one hand clasping the trailing edge of the left upper panel. He was wheezing, "I can't swim! I can't swim!"

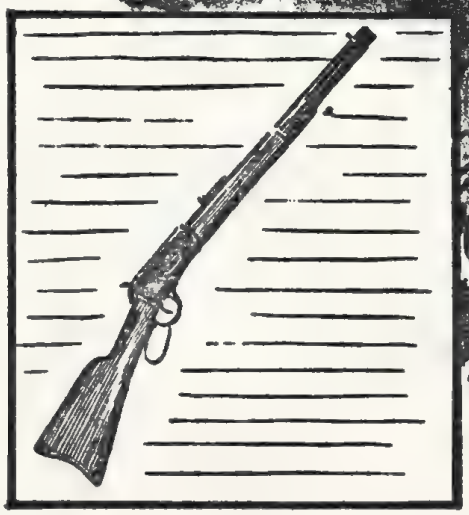
this mail. You're working for Uncle Sam now... Want you men to meet Mr. Pool... Hey, Mr. Pool, where the devil did you go?" Mr. Pool, still on his back, had drifted through under the top wing, and now he was out front near the radiator. Collison said, "The little man likes to play around. Just a shake, men, till I lay across this top panel and tow him back... There you be, Mr. Pool."

Finally, Mr. Pool and Pilot Collison sat among the pouches and bags in the rowboat. Mr. Pool was recovering. He was angry. He was even getting vocal. He said, "Mr. Pilot, this is outrageous! Air Mail Headquarters shall hear from me. Your San Francisco man—this Mr. Googan —I'll let him know."

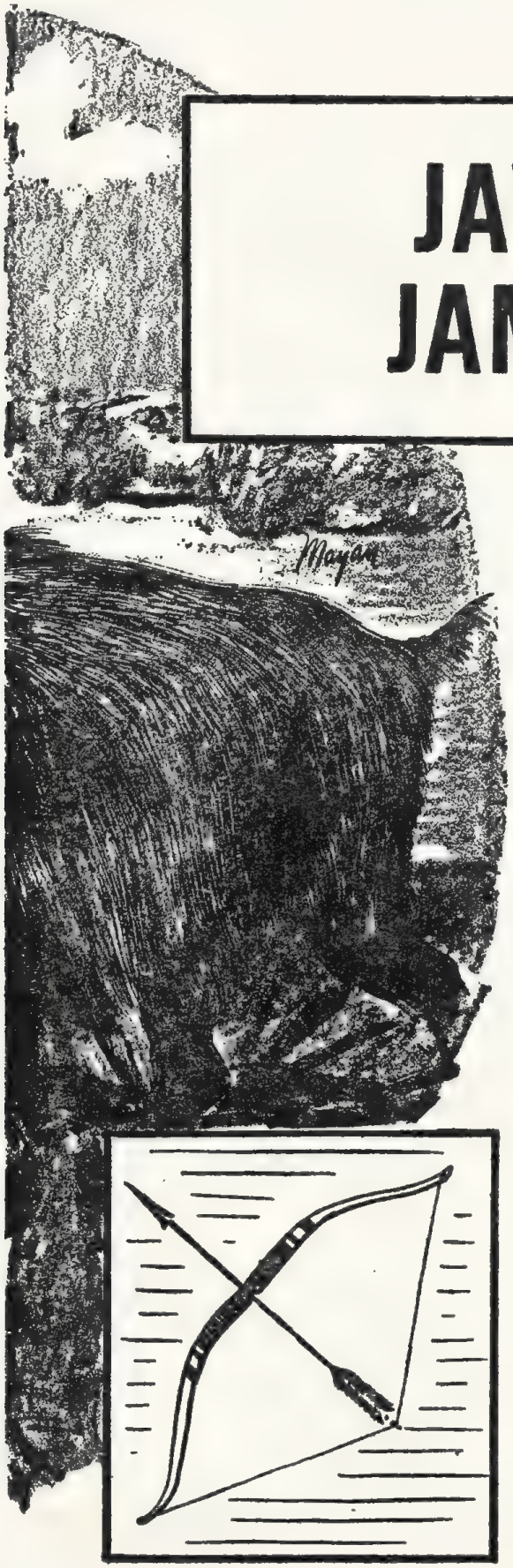
"That's no good," Slim Collison notified the little man. "Our Mr. Googan only gives the orders. He gave this one early this morning. I just carry them out. Lives there a man who can say that I didn't?"

The piledriver men didn't understand the drift of the conversation. Anyway, as they understood the thing, all those flying guys were nuts. Anybody in Salt Lake City would tell you so.

The boar swarmed over me, ripping, trying to get at my throat and face.



JAVELINA JAMBOREE



ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL EUGENE MAYAN

THERE'S something tremendously impelling about a scarred face. And when it's a face like gray-haired Tom Perry's, not reminiscent of violent ways, but kind-eyed, rugged, tanned as saddle leather, lined and creased by years of desert sun and wind—and with a deep, jagged slash running jowl to temple across the right cheek—you feel you'll never be satisfied until you know the story behind it.

A stranger I talked to on the street in Phoenix, Arizona, had sent me to Tom, when I inquired where I could get a guide for a *javelina* hunt. I'd never hunted the little native wild pig of the southwest, but my enthusiasm was low. After all, I had planned REAL excitement—mountain lions. But the dog pack I'd hoped to hire was booked. I'd had to settle for this farmyard stuff, little porkers that wouldn't

●

A FACT STORY

●

By BYRON W. DALRYMPLE

weigh fifty pounds stuffed with cactus apples. I felt like a schoolkid who brags of bears, then sneaks off to pot cottontails.

So now we sat by our evening campfire, Tom Perry and I, miles from nowhere, out in the ominous darkness and silence of the brooding Superstition Mountains. I watched firelight flicker across Tom's scarred face, and several times I was on the verge of asking bluntly about the story behind that jagged slash.

I had packed away my heavy rifle, after the lion deal fell through. I began cleaning the high-powered little twenty-two I had brought along for this pink-tea pig hunt. Tom watched me, first with amusement, then with irritation.

Finally he said, "Ever hunted pigs before?"

"No."

"Put that pea-shooter away, then. I brought my heavy rifle for you."

I laughed. Then I looked up and saw Tom's face dead serious, commanding. A picture of the man as I had first seen him flashed across my mind—out in his back yard engrossed in, of all things, archery practice! I glanced at the tree against which his bow now leaned. I laughed again. "He's sneering at my small rifle," I thought, "yet he brings along a bow and arrow"

He read my thoughts. "You don't have much respect for these little wild pigs, do you? And you think that bow of mine is a toy, eh?"

I said, "I had a bow when I was a kid—before I was old enough for a gun. I had a pet pig, too. It loved my mother's cookies. That answer both questions?"

Tom got up and walked around the fire. For the first time, I noticed his limp. He came back and sat down. What had been the beginning of anger faded from his face. "Now and again," he said kindly enough, "you easterners get too big for your chaps. Most of you have lots to learn."

He rolled a cigarette, scooped up a coal from the edge of the fire, bounced it in his calloused hand, lit the cigarette. "Let me tell you a story."

Presently his tale began to unfold. I thought of the heavy rifle he had brought for me, and of my little twenty-two. I glanced again at his heavy bow, leaning there against the tree. I decided maybe Tom was right. We smart-aleck easterners often do have a lot to learn—but perhaps I'd better let Tom Perry tell his story in his own words.

THERE WERE just the two of us (this is Tom Perry talking) —young Jimmy McQuade and me—riding into the Superstition foothills that morning. I'd promised Jimmy a deer hunt. You'd have to know about him.

Jimmy McQuade was an easterner, a strapping, black-haired lad of twenty-two. He was visiting his uncle in Phoenix, and I had struck up a friendship with him. An enthusiastic kid, with a hobby of archery. He could tell you, as I found out later, how far each type of arrow would penetrate wood, steel—or flesh, from whatever yardage distance he happened to be shooting. And, as I was to learn, he was a mighty good judge of the distance to his target. There wasn't anything, I reckon, that young Jimmy didn't know about the bow and arrow, and he was so crazy to try his skill on deer that I fixed up this hunt.

At the time, though, I didn't know whether he shot well or not, and I didn't much care. I liked the lad, and I knew he'd enjoy the trip. If we found game, he could shoot at it, and go home remembering the thrill of his misses. I had little faith, and less interest, in the bow as a weapon for big game.

We had picked up horses from Hank Lane, of Bar O, a rancher I knew out this way. When we got to the ranch that morning, Hank had said, "I saw a drove of peccaries feeding along Quajote Wash yesterday, Tom. You'll pass right along it."

"Say now," Jimmy beamed, climbing atop his horse and arranging his quiver and bow, "that sounds like *something!*"

Hank Lane leaned his lank frame against the corral fence and looked at me with a sour expression. I had to admit Jimmy and I made an odd sight—an old-time miner, out on a hunting trip with a young, enthused Robin Hood a'horseback who knew little of this country and nothing of wild pigs.

Hank said, "That youngster oughta have a gun." Then, to Jimmy, "If you run onto that drove, you stay on your horse, son. They're touchy sometimes. I don't reckon Tom wants to lug you and that Indian slingshot back here in a blanket!"

You see, the peccary, or *javelina,* is an odd little beast. There's lots of argument as to whether or not he's dangerous. Sometimes a young one will walk out of the mesquite and come right up to you, friendly as anything. Sometimes a big drove will run like deer at sight of a man. And again, you can't tell. They're heavy shouldered, lean in the flanks, have poor eyesight, but fine noses, and tusks that can do plenty damage.

I tell you, when a wounded tusker opens his mouth and makes at you, chattering and drooling, he'll show spirit to belie his size—I KNOW!—and an expression as much like a raging wolf as anything you want to see. They're not like the boars of the deep south, which are really domestic razorback hogs gone wild. No, these fellows have always been here, the only wild pig native to this part of the world.

Many a man has scoffed at the idea of danger being pent-up in only fifty-odd pounds of peccary. And many a man has hunted 'em, roasted young shoats over his fire, year in and year out, with never any trouble. What such fellows forget is that there are upsets in every game. I learned that the hard way. I was one of those skeptics who got over-confident.

We hit the trail of the drove in a cholla patch at the head of Quajote, Wash. From the tracks, I judged there were maybe twenty animals. The trail followed into some thick stuff, greasewood, mesquite, and cactus, and came out, farther up the wash, to head up into the rising foothills toward a table of thin rock grown to scrub trees.

This was big country, with plenty of room for them to elude us. I pulled up and gave Jimmy my plan of battle. "You take the left side of the rock table on a long circle. I'll take the right, to cut 'em off from the canyon on that side." I watched his eager face a minute, then grinned at him and said good-naturedly, "In case you should happen to hit anything with that fiddle-string outfit of yours, what damage do you figure to do, son?"

The kid pulled out an arrow with a three-way, knife-edged head of steel. He said testily, "At twenty-five yards, I'll drive that sidewise through a running pig so the shaft feathers are buried in him. Endwise, I'll enter it at his rump, and bury the head in his skull!"

I laughed. "I'd have to see that," I ribbed him. "Look, you stick on that horse. Remember this, a wounded pig in a drove this size just might mean trouble. You knock one down, he starts squealing, and the rest may run off—or they may attack you. You never know."

He grinned broadly. "If I knock one down, Tom," he bragged, "it won't ever squeal again."

I roweled my horse, and called back, "Good luck, then, and be careful." I could picture a pig running through the brush with an arrow pricking his hinder, squealing his head off and scared silly.

IT WAS odd, I thought as I rode, that I should have all of a sudden become so cautious, trying to impress Jimmy with the danger of wild pigs. Strangely, just for a second, I felt a premonition of some unforeseen danger. Then I laughed aloud. Was I getting to be a sissy in my old age? A few little wild porkers making me nervous! I'd shot dozens of 'em, knocking 'em over clean as spring rain. I decided young McQuade's bow and arrow were at the bottom of it. I'd have felt better if he'd had a gun.

My circle to the right took me along the edge of the high rock table. Here and there a patch of loose sand showed scattered pig tracks. Old ones. The drove must be somewhere to my left, I figured, between Jimmy and me. Maybe he would get up on 'em and get a good shot. I heard a jay scolding. A big jackrabbit jumped out of the brush beneath the horse. She shied. It struck me she acted nervous, but I couldn't see any reason why she should. I looked down to see a maze of tracks—pig tracks—but from atop the horse I couldn't tell immediately how old they were.

Without giving the slightest thought to my action, I swung down, dropping the horse's reins. She was a slow, settled old cow pony, and stood calmly waiting while I examined the tracks, except that now and then she tossed her head, blowing, still nervous. Still I attached no importance to her action.

Just ahead, the brush opened onto a small, sandy clearing with a huge boulder,

perhaps six feet high and flat on top, standing in the center. I took my rifle from its scabbard and moved ahead into the clearing, studying the tracks in the loose sand. There was a popping of twigs to my left, then behind me. My head came up. I whirled, staring intently in the direction of the sound. There, to my far left, and again, almost directly behind me, were two pigs, almost completely hidden by the thick brush. I had apparently come upon these two strays unexpectedly. They were hiding in the brush, watching me curiously. I must have passed, on foot, within ten feet of the one.

Almost unconsciously, I measured the distance to the horse, then to the boulder in the clearing. Either was about the same. I pulled up my gun and started to level it on the nearest pig. The other, I told myself, will run when I shoot. But suppose it frightens my horse? I wished I knew where the rest of the drove was.

I had the answer along with the thought. There was a chattering, grunting sound ahead of me. Instinctively, I pulled my gun off its target and whirled back to look. The sound broke out now on every side. The horse snorted, shied. From out of the brush all around me those little tusked devils came trotting, their silver-gray collar bristles upended like danger signs.

Two strays, eh? Ha! I had walked in on the whole drove! They had been in this clearing, had retired to the brush as I rode up. The horse had smelled them, and I, who worried about young McQuade, had pulled the worst boner possible.

I was surrounded, cut off. But I had my rifle, and I threw a couple of quick shots into them, knocking one over. The rest raced in, popping twigs, chattering their teeth. The horse reared and swung away, crashing off into the brush. I didn't know whether those pigs were mad, or just curious, but you can bet I didn't stand there trying to decide! I covered the space between me and that big boulder in about two strides—and if you think a man of middle age can't jump six feet straight up, you should have seen me hit the top of that rock!

Now there are a lot of westerners who would tell you those pigs were simply curious, so nearsighted they had to run in to smell this man smell and decide whether or not it meant danger to them. But if you could have looked down, with me, from the top of that rock, into the faces of those devils as they chomped their teeth and milled about, I figure you'd have felt just as I did—scared, yet somehow hypnotized by what I saw.

I did a little fast thinking. Like a fool, I had left all my extra shells in my saddle bag. There were three left in the gun. That meant I could kill three pigs. But maybe Jimmy, who must have heard those first shots, would come tearing in, if I shot again—maybe even on foot. Or maybe he'd ride up, try to handle that bow from horseback, and get thrown among those pigs. He didn't ride too well, and I didn't want him in trouble.

One heavy-shouldered boar reared up, placed his forefeet against the rock, and chattered at me. Don't tell me he wouldn't have liked to sink those five-inch tusks into me!

I leaned down and clubbed him with my gun barrel. Then I clubbed another. The blasted demons never budged an inch. "That," I said aloud, "settles that. If you won't run, a couple of you, at least, are going to get it!" I threw my gun to my shoulder, laced out a shot. The wild echo ran along the rock table as one pig went down.

WELL sir, those tuskers scattered like the devil himself had cracked down among them. Suddenly the fire of the hunt was in me. I was the winner and I had my tormentors on the run. I leaped down off the rock and threw another shot after them. The big boar who had reared up at me went down in the fore, a front leg broken. But he quickly recovered and tore off into the brush with incredible speed for a three-legged beast—and at that moment young McQuade came riding hell-bent through the brush.

"Let's get him!" I yelled. I wasn't worried about anything now. Those pigs, I knew, were so frightened and so scattered that there was nothing more to fear. I ran for my horse. The old nag had stopped, a couple hundred yards away, had waited obediently. I grabbed some shells and prepared to follow the blood trail of that boar, on foot. He'd soon stiffen up,

and I'd have that ugly devil across my saddle!

"Rowel your horse down the side of the mountain," I ordered Jimmy. "That pig will head for the wash. Maybe you can turn him. Circle fast and come in ahead of me. Get going!"

McQuade tore off through the brush, making a comic, incongruous sight as he rode with his bow in hand. As I trailed the pig, I saw how he turned down toward the wash, then back up a little way, then down again. I thought: "If McQuade heads him, I don't want him to slip back beside me. I'll stick right to the trail. I'll get this devil in ten minutes!" He was bleeding badly, and I knew positively that he couldn't last long if we pressed him—not on three legs.

I was walking steadily, slowly ahead, bent over, eyes glued to those splotches of blood on the rock and sand. Twice I pulled up to listen. I would have sworn I heard a sound, off to my right, up on the flat rock table, and behind me. But no, that was crazy. The trail of the pig kept leading down. He'd never expend failing energy to push up the mountainside to the flat. He'd be cornered on top if he did. And anyway, no blasted pig would have sense enough to be cunning about this thing. He'd simply flee for his life.

I took a few more steps. I paused to examine a blood-stained spot where he had stopped to rest. I never heard a sound—not until that devil was within twenty feet of me. There was a whisper of small hoofs in sand. I whirled, bringing my gun up and around, a chill racing along my spine. I have never seen a three-legged animal make such time. He was directly behind me, nose to my trail like a wolf, slavering, his gray-bristled shoulder soaked with blood, teeth bared, tusks jutting like miniature javelins.

Like a picture on a page, I saw what had happened. He had led us downhill, then turned straight up, circled, picked up my trail which followed his own. With no time to aim, I shot impulsively from the hip—and missed. I suppose my disbelief at what I saw had unnerved me. I yelled. I don't know what I said, but it must have indicated my chill of freezing fear.

Then he hit me, all of it happening in the snap of your fingers. I felt a tusk rip into my leg and come slashing up from ankle to knee. I went down in a heap, gun flying out of my hands. One leg useless, I fought now for my life, clawing at that maniac pig. He was squealing and chattering. I felt a tusk rip along my ribs. I beat him in the face with my fists.

I remember rolling and tumbling to get away. But the boar, his blood mingling now with mine, swarmed over me, ripping, trying to get at my throat and face. The rest of it was like something out of a horrible dream. I don't suppose the whole thing took two minutes. There was a crashing of brush. McQuade, I realized, had heard my yell and was riding in. But he had only that blasted bow. If only I had insisted on his bringing a gun! If only I could get to my own!

Then my break—or so I thought then—came. At the sound of McQuade's horse, the boar backed off momentarily. I lunged weakly toward where my gun lay. I had it, had that good sturdy weapon in my grip!

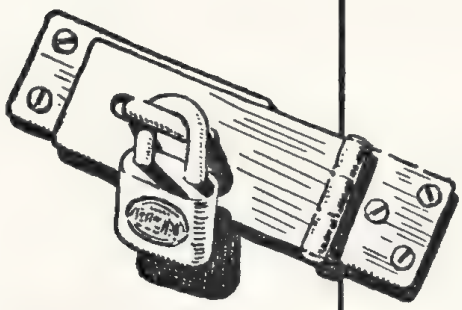
I rolled onto my side and leveled on him in a split second. I squeezed the trigger. The hammer clicked on an empty chamber. Frantically, I worked the lever—and the damned gun, full of sand from where it had fallen, jammed!

The boar was on me again. I clubbed at him with the gun barrel. He didn't even seem to feel it, and both of us went rolling crazily across the sand. In wild fear now, I let go of the gun and tried only to protect my face and throat. I knew I was done for, yet the will to live made me fight to hold on as long as possible.

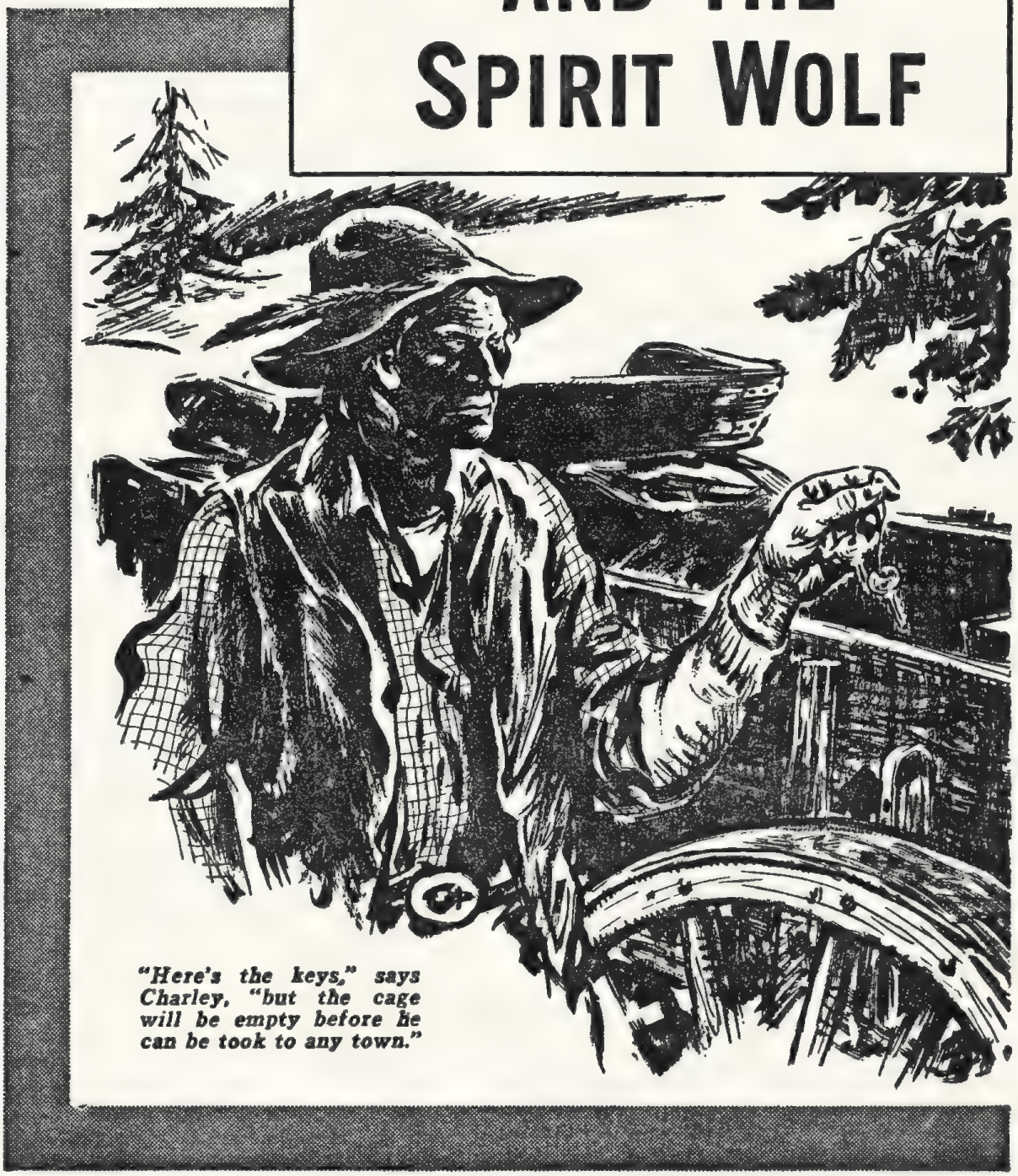
And then young Jimmy McQuade appeared. I remember the thought raced through my mind that the kid would rush in and try to grapple that tusked devil with his hands. Just thinking it made me lose all hope. If only Hank Lane had come along, he'd have clubbed that pig to death with a gun butt—but a kid like McQuade would never think of that!

AS IN a nightmare, I remember seeing McQuade come down off his horse, as calm as if this were an everyday occurrence. He simply rolled off that pony, spread his boots, and raised his bow. His right arm shot back, pulling the bowthong. The

(Continued on page 146)



CHARLEY HOE HANDLE AND THE SPIRIT WOLF



"Here's the keys," says Charley, "but the cage will be empty before he can be took to any town."

By JIM KJELGAARD

EVERY NOW and again Horse Jenkins, the warden of Stick County, got a job he didn't like. And he didn't like the idea of ketchin' the Mardsden wolf. But—

"Bring him in alive," the big shots in the department had told Horse. "As far as we know he's the last wild timber wolf in the state. We want him for exhibition."

When the big shots say that, there ain't nothin' for a field man to do but bring him in alive. Not that it was goin' to be easy. The Mardsden wolf wasn't no fox pup that'd come trottin' up and take a hunk of hamburger out of a man's hand. Only the best trapper could ketch him.

Then there was some other things as made Horse feel down in the mouth. More

ILLUSTRATED BY
PETER KUHLHOFF

than twenty-five years ago, when he had started in the warden business, there had been a good many wild gray wolves runnin' around. Horse hisself had ketched or helped ketch a-plenty, and he knowed it was right that they should be ketched. Gray wolves and people can't live in the same country at the same time. But the very last gray wolf . . .! If he was ketched he would be put in a little two by four cage, and be stared at by fat old women, and maybe felt a little sorry for by old men, and giggled at by kids, and . . . Dammit! One wolf didn't do much damage, and it seemed that this one *might* be left where he was.

Still—an order was an order, and a man couldn't go on feelin' sorry for a wolf. As soon as he begun to think that way Horse begun to think of all the ways the wolf might be ketched, and the first thing he done was make a list of all the people who had tried in the past three years to ketch him. It was considerable of a list. Four zoos had wanted the wolf, then there was some museums, some college kids, some private collectors, and a man what thought he could teach a wolf to retrieve ducks for him. Everybody had come back without him, and no one party had tried twice to ketch that wolf or talked about it after they tried once. And every party had hired Charley Hoe Handle to do their trappin' for 'em.

Horse chewed up a pencil tryin' to figger that out. Charley Hoe Handle was as slick a Injun as had ever set foot in Stick County, and by rights he should of been in jail thirty years ago. But, if anybody could clamp a trap on that wolf, Charley could.

After thinkin' about it a while, Horse started out to see Charley Hoe Handle.

HE DROVE his car as far as he could, and hit up an old tote road on foot. There was thick spruces on both sides, and Horse sort of smiled as he walked along. Forty years ago, when the lumbermen had come through here, except for stumps they had left the place bald as a tomato. But the timber was comin' back. Swell young trees they was, and where the branches growed over the tote road they was so thick that in lots of places, for a hundred yards at a stretch, it was hard to see more'n a couple of feet in any direction.

Two and a half miles up the road Horse busted into a clearin' and saw Charley Hoe Handle's log cabin. Snug and tight it was, and built against a knoll that made a good windbreak. The old Injun hisself was settin' beside his cabin, and Horse Jenkins sort of smiled to hisself. Nobody except Charley Hoe Handle could act as innocent as a new-born lamb the while he was thinkin' in a way what'd do credit to any devil. But Horse wasn't smilin' when he got out where Charley could see him; it didn't pay to leave Charley think you was easy. Charley turned around.

"Well, well, well, Horse Jenkins hisself!" says he. "I'm glad to see you!"

"I'll bet," says Horse. "How many minutes ago did you hide all the illegal game or fish in your cabin?"

"Why, Horse!" says Charley. "You know me better than that! How can you say such a thing? Come in and search my cabin."

"Skip it," says Horse, who had searched Charley's cabin before. "I'm on a different business."

Charley Hoe Handle says piously, "Natcherally, if I can help you ketch some of these vi'lators—"

"Skip that too," says Horse. "I want you to ketch the Mardsden wolf. I want him alive."

Charley Hoe Handle didn't say nothin'. He just turned his black eyes towards the ground and stood stock still. He froze up as only a Injun can freeze, and Horse Jenkins begun to feel a sort of little tingle along his spine. Then he begun, in his mind, to kick hisself for feelin' that way. Maybe Horse couldn't ketch Charley Hoe Handle, but he'd like to see the day he couldn't kick the slats off him if he had a mind to.

"Well?" Horse was mad.

Charley Hoe Handle raised his eyes and looked at Horse. "I thought you said the Mardsden wolf," says he.

"I did say the Mardsden wolf," says Horse. "I got orders to bring it in alive."

"Horse," says Charley Hoe Handle, "you an' me's had many a tangle, but I'd as soon give you a straight tip. Leave that wolf alone. He's *Windigo.*"

"Windigo, my hat!" says Horse. "That wolf's no more of a sperrit than you and me are! What's the matter? Can't you ketch him?"

"Horse," says Charley Hoe Handle, "I can ketch him."

"Then why are you hangin' back? Are you scared of him?"

"Horse," says Charley Hoe Handle, "I ain't scared of him. I can ketch that wolf, and put him in a cage a cimarron bear couldn't bust, and bar the door, and lock it. But the cage will be empty before he can be took to any town."

"You're still crazy!"

"Mebbe. But I've told you."

"Where's the cage?"

"Right over there."

Horse looked at the cage, what was made out of two by fours and had two inch bars. No wolf ever born could get out of it. Horse looked at Charley Hoe Handle.

"When can you have the wolf?"

"Tomorrow mornin', and he'll cost you twenty-five dollars—in advance."

Horse give him the money and walked down the trail.

THE NEXT mornin', drivin' a team and wagon, Horse went back up that trail. The spruce branches brushed his face, and the wheels clattered over the rocks, and Horse was feelin' a little bit glad on account he could deliver the wolf and a little bit sad on account he had to. He drove into Charley's cabin, and right away saw that Charley had the wolf.

It was layin' in the cage, a big gray thing what turned yellow eyes on Horse. It didn't growl, or snarl, or do anything but stare a minute.

Horse says to Charley Hoe Handle, "Let's get him loaded."

"Sure," says Charley Hoe Handle, "providin' you still want to."

"I want to."

"Here's the keys to the cage."

They put the cage in the back of the wagon, and Horse looked it over real careful. The door was padlocked. The bars was strong and so close together even a rabbit couldn't get through. Nothin' was wrong. Horse slapped his team across their backs and they started down the tote road. They come to the spruces, and Horse bent real low and closed his eyes so they wouldn't be branch-whipped. He drove into Beaver Junction and Johnny Logan, loafin' on the street, hollered, "What you aim to cage now, Horse?"

Horse looked around, and his jaw dropped halfway to his chest. A little cold feelin' crept over him. The cage was still locked, and no bars was busted. It was exactly as it had been when he left Charley's—except that no wolf was in it.

"Whoa!" Horse hollered to the team.

He turned around right in the middle of the street and, mad clear through, drove back up that tote road. Charley Hoe Handle was settin' beside his cabin, whittlin' on a new pike plug, and he looked square at Horse.

"You . . .!" Horse says. "That—blankety—wolf got away!"

"I warned you," says Charley Hoe Handle.

"Yes, you warned me, you slippery—"

For a minute Horse sat on the wagon, still mad as a stepped-on badger and knowin' perfectly well what had happened. He thought of the fifteen or sixteen people who had paid Charley Hoe Handle twenty-five dollars for catchin' and cagin' that wolf, and of how, when they was goin' down the tote road, Charley would run up behind the wagon, wait until it got in the spruces, climb on, unlock the cage with a key he held back, let the wolf go, and lock the cage again. Nothin' else made sense, and Horse Jenkins was countin' the seconds until he jumped off the wagon and busted that old Injun's fool head for him. But—

"Charley," says he, "I'm goin' to report that I can't ketch that wolf. The department will send another man in to get him, and prob'ly he'll want you to trap for him. How about it?"

"Sure," says Charley Hoe Handle, "for twenty-five dollars."

"All right," says Horse. "I—Oh, all right."

He turned and drove back down that tote road, and he knowed that, even though any sane man could figger out for hisself what had happened, he didn't want to talk about it. Of course it all added up and made sense and anybody at all could figure it out. But—

"Dammit!" Horse says to the team. "Get movin'!"

He looked all around and cussed hisself for doin' it, because anybody who knowed anything at all knowed that Charley Hoe Handle just *had* to let that wolf go.

BATTLE OF THE RANGERS

By
JAMES T. DOTY

A FACT STORY

SOMEONE has said that more has been written about the Texas Rangers than any other phase of the Lone Star State's history. This is indubitably true. The Rangers were, and are, good copy. A great deal of this written material has been of a controversial nature over the origin of this world famous organization, though it has by no means been confined to the printed page. Whenever and wherever good Texans get together the argument is likely to flare up. There are four popular schools of thought on the subject: (1) the Pre-Republic School, which contends that they were first formed by Stephen F. Austin before Texas won its independence; (2) the Republic School, which argues that the organization first appeared by decree of the Texas Revolutionary Government; (3) the Mexican War School which favors Jack Hays' regiment which served with Generals Taylor and Scott; and (4) the Post-Civil War School, which holds out for 1874, when the Rangers had their heyday under McNelly.

What's the truth of the matter? Well, as in most arguments, they are all partly wrong. It's all a matter of definition. The crux of the difficulty lies in just what a man chooses to call a Texas Ranger. Let's

DECORATION BY ROGER L. THOMAS

consider the evidence as presented by history.

The first mention of *rangers* that anyone has been able to find in Texas history is dated 1823 when Stephen F. Austin, the great *empresario,* took steps to protect his newly established colony on the *Rio Brazos de Dios* from marauding Karankawas. He organized small bodies of volunteers to *range* the frontier and look for hostile Indians. These might be compared to militia who are called out only in times of emergency. The Pre-Republic School says these were the original rangers.

The Texas War of Independence was fought in 1835-'36. On October 17, 1835 the revolutionary council created a *corps of rangers.* They were placed under the authority of the Commander-in-chief of the army—Sam Houston. Like their predecessors in Austin's colony, they were strictly volunteer and received no pay. Throughout the revolution these mounted men patrolled the frontier and protected the settlers from Indian depredations while the army went about the business of whipping Santa Anna. When one group thought it had done its share it disbanded and another took its place.

After the revolution had been brought to a successful conclusion on the plains of St. Hyacinth the rangers were continued. The Mexicans may have been defeated, but as far as the Comanches were concerned it was still open season on white men. These rangers under the Republic were organized along more orthodox military lines, although they elected their own officers. They enlisted for definite terms and received wages. Here, then, are the rangers the Republic School has in mind.

During the Mexican War a regiment of volunteers was organized which probably did most to put the term *Texas Rangers* before the public eye. These men, under Colonel Jack Hays made history. Serving as the eyes and ears of General Taylor they won undying fame, a reputation for toughness, and the name *Diablos Tejanos* from their adversaries. They were the first military organization in history to use the Colt revolver—a weapon which helped a great deal in establishing their reputation as fighters. Their execution of Mexicans with it approaches the fabulous.

During the Civil War the rangers were neglected, as the state was almost completely drained of manpower. Only one other state, Virginia, furnished more men for the Confederate armies.

In 1874 the organizations which are probably referred to most when we speak of Texas Rangers were created. One, known as the Special Force of Rangers, was to put down banditry on the Rio Grande. The other, the Frontier Battalion of Rangers, was made up of mobile groups, which were to deal with crime wherever it might be found over the state. These are the Rangers which have been immortalized by fiction writers. Riding to fame under such intrepid leaders as Captain L. H. McNelly, Captain Lee Hall, Major John B. Jones, and Captain Bill McDonald they have been the cause of more verbiage than any other group of men who ever lived. According to the Post-Civil War School these, then, were the real, original Texas Rangers.

As was pointed out before, it's a matter of definition. *Hombre,* you bets your money, and you takes your choice!

SALMON

Ash came up with a rock in his hand. "Yellow and dirty," Don said, and started in.

By

ROBERT E. PINKERTON

THE STORY THUS FAR:

ALASKA hasn't changed much while DON CAMERON has been away fighting in World War I. Now—in 1920—it is still plenty tough. But Don's worries are personal and particular. One, has anyone filed a claim to the rich Chickwan River salmon run he'd discovered and cleaned out in '17? And, two, is he still married to SUE, the girl he'd courted, wed, quarreled

SWEEPSTAKES

ILLUSTRATED BY MONROE EISENBERG

with and separated from, all in three hectic weeks before he went away?

On his return to Ketchikan, Don is met by his old friend, THAD BOYLE, who tells him the Chickwan run is still undiscovered. Don looks forward to a harvest of half a million humpies—the famous two-year-old pink salmon of Southeast Alaska.

Unable to find Sue, Don goes to see Mrs. NEVADA BAIRD, Sue's guardian and long a power in Alaska salmon fishing. Nevada tells him she has refused to give her consent to an annulment until Sue is old enough to know her own mind. Then Don receives a blow. He learns that ASH MOULTON, a ruthless operator in the canning and fishing industries—who has been courting Sue in Don's absence—has filed for a trap-site on Chickwan. Don fights Ash on the main street of Ketchikan, Ash getting the better of the brawl—and Don publicly vows to get even, and drive

Ash out of Alaska forever. He calls on ENOS SLOCUM, who agrees to lend him the money to buy a cannery in nearby Tamgas—and Nevada promises to sell him her fish. Don sees a chance to drive Ash out of business. But again Ash beats him to the punch. He persuades Slocum to withdraw his support. Don's position is apparently hopeless.

Meanwhile, MARTY BOYLE, Thad's ne'er-do-well brother, turns up in Ketchikan. Thad assumes that Marty, an inveterate horse-player, is down and out. But little Marty shows a strange interest in the salmon fishing game. He pesters Don with questions and finally comes out with an astonishing offer. Far from being broke, he is fresh from a run of luck at the tracks, and he will back Don in his canning venture to the tune of $25,000. He calls it "laying a bet on the two-year-olds."

PART II

THAD wouldn't believe it but Don accepted Marty's word that the money was real. He couldn't play it any other way. Out of nowhere his chance had come and he grabbed it.

"Wait," Marty said. "We ain't figured the odds yet. What am I betting against?"

"Half the profits," Don said. "It's a lot more'n the interest a broker charges but you've got me in a hole."

"Fair enough," Marty said. "Maybe it's too fair."

"Sure it's too fair!" Thad said. "When Don packs ten thousand cases you'll be in the clear. And he'll pack three-four times that. You can't lose."

"No bookmaker gave me anything like that," Marty said. "And if I lose the bet I'll still get something back. I doped it wrong. I'll take a third to your two-thirds. Shake?"

Don shook hands, and he had a feeling Marty didn't expect any further agreement or contract. The whole thing was incredible. No one had seen what lay behind those drooping eyelids. No one had taken the strange little man seriously. Don's exuberance demanded expression, but when he turned warmly to Marty the hard, mummified gambler's face stopped him.

"We got to rustle from here on," Don said. "I'll get Lloyd Geary to take you to Ketchikan."

Even after the purse seiner had departed with Marty aboard, Don found it difficult to get back to earth. He knew his first job was to clinch Nevada's fish but it was nearly noon before he climbed the slope to her house.

Sue came to the door, stood looking at him.

"I want to see Nevada," he said.

"She left early this morning," Sue said. "A crew is working on her traps."

"Know where the traps are?"

Sue named two bays in which they were stored. She was maddeningly impersonal and Don hesitated. He wanted to talk to her.

"I mailed a check to you this morning," she said.

"I won't take it."

"I'll never touch the money. It isn't mine. And Nevada—she said you needed it."

"I don't need it."

He was riding high. Nothing could stop him. As he looked at her it struck him that, had everything gone right, this is the girl, the wife, he'd have rushed home to when his cannery was saved. Only nothing had gone right and he'd never known why. Now, for the first time in four years, he could get an answer.

"Why did you quit me?" he demanded.

She was caught off guard and took a step back, but when she spoke her tone was casual.

"That was only kid stuff," she said.

"I was no kid. You didn't act like one."

She smiled, and it maddened him. He wanted to break down the barrier of her cool impersonal manner.

"It wouldn't work," she said. "It—it just fell apart."

"You mean you smashed it!"

He was thoroughly angry now. "You never gave it a chance!" he said. "Never gave me a break. Wouldn't let me see you. Let me go off wondering what in hell was the matter. Kept me wondering until I got one letter from you. You never explained that when I kept writing. Fell apart hell! You ripped it apart."

Suddenly his rage left him. He'd been getting things off his chest but, thinking of those days four years ago, he found the old bewilderment and hurt flooding back.

"When I first saw you I couldn't tell you how I felt," he said. "I'd never cared about a girl before. But if that was being in love, I had as bad a case of it as a man can get."

Don stopped. It had taken a lot to get that out. And when Sue looked at him the cool assurance was gone.

"That's the way it was then," he said. "I figured you were perfect. Every way. And when you handed me a raw deal I couldn't believe it. It didn't jibe with the way I had you sized up. And it was a raw deal. Whatever bothered you, you could have told me. Only you didn't. You lay on the floor and kicked and yelled. I guess—" He hesitated, and then, because it was the truth, it came out. "Guess I was lucky. Anybody without guts enough to speak his mind—I couldn't have taken it long."

He turned away. He'd said it, and he had no hope she would offer any explanation. She'd had her chance. His feet were on the lower step when he heard his name.

"Don!" she said.

He looked back. She had come out onto the veranda. Her face was flushed and for the first time he saw the faint white line of a scar on her left cheek. He found himself wondering why he liked it. It didn't mar her beauty. It gave distinction and maturity.

"You're right," she said, and her eyes had a steady fire that was of determination and not of pride or anger. "You had a raw deal. I didn't think so then. Perhaps I was thinking only of myself. I know I was. But when I came to after the ether I asked for you. The first thing. And you weren't there. They told me about Mrs. Boyle and how you'd gone after Thad but I wouldn't listen. All I thought was that I was lying hurt and scarred for life and wanting to have you tell me you didn't mind whether I had a face or not. But you weren't there. You'd gone off some place. I didn't care where or why. I only knew you thought more of someone else than you did of me."

She stopped. She wasn't looking at him now, but past him.

"That's the way it started," she said. "I thought I hated you. I wanted to hurt you. I told the doctors and the nurses not to let you in the room. And when you went away fishing without coming, without knocking a doctor down and throwing nurses out the window, when you left me lying there with my leg in a cast, I wrote that letter. I meant it. I never wanted to see you again."

Don listened, uncomfortable even when she told what he'd demanded to know. He didn't like to see anyone turn himself wrongside out like this.

"It was worse when I came back here and Nevada wouldn't get me an annulment," she said. "After a while I began to see I was a selfish little fool. But that took a long time, and I kept blaming you, and hating you. I'd burn your letters as soon as they came. I hoped you suffered. That—that's the sort I was."

Don came back onto the veranda but she retreated to the door.

"I've told you," she said. "That girl—I try to think it wasn't me. I want to think none of that ever happened. I want to forget her. You'd better do the same."

She darted inside and shut the door. Don remembered what Nevada had said about breaking down hospital doors but he knew it wouldn't get him anything now. Sue wasn't the girl he had married. She'd tried to tell him so, tried to make him understand that, while she'd been a spoiled brat, the past was still the past and deeply buried. He went back to the cannery.

CHAPTER V

A CHANCE TO FIGHT

DON had plenty to do but he didn't do it. For two hours he sat in the office trying to fit himself into this new picture of Sue. More than ever he knew this was not the same girl he had married. He'd forgotten her too.

Thad came in and scowled when he saw Dan's face.

"You been up the hill to Nevada's while I'm making cans," he said. "Why don't you get some fish to put in 'em?"

Don went down to the floats. Halmar Jensen had been away but now the big Norwegian who had thrown Sockeye Sam through a window was working on the engine in his gas boat. His wide face was like a boy's, his blue eyes frank.

"Moulton bought your fish yet?" Don asked.

"He make an offer," Halmar said. "Four and a half for pinks and nine for sockeyes. And I get no sockeyes."

Don was jolted. He hadn't thought Ash would go so low.

"What does your trap take?" he asked.

"Bad year I get hundred thousand, good year maybe hundred and fifty. Not enough for another cannery to come so far."

"Ash staking you to cable or web?"

"No, Nevada she loan me thousand dollars. She the best friend fisherman's got in Alaska. Play square with Nevada and you got nothing to worry about but the fish."

"How about fish pirates?"

Halmar grinned like a kid. "They never bother me," he said, and he lifted his great arms. "I watch my trap myself."

"I'll pay you five and a half cents," Don said.

"But Ash tells me you close down. One of your men tell me."

"I started that story," Don said. "Wanted you trap owners and purse seiners to see what sort Moulton is. I'll pay you five and a half at the trap, and if the season gets better I'll pay more. I'll put that in the contract."

Halmar looked at Don. He looked him all over.

"I remember when you was a little boy trolling for springs at Ketchikan," he said. "You've bought some fish."

In the rest of the day Don found two purse seiners who needed seines and signed them to contracts. All this meant a lot of fish that wouldn't go to Sukoi Bay, and Don felt fine at supper. Ash would need at least 1,100,000 to fill his cans. Ash's troubles had started.

Ash knew it. Next forenoon when Don was talking to a purse seiner on the floats, Ash came swiftly out from shore.

"What in hell you trying to do, Cameron?" he demanded. "Offering five and a half for pinks when you can't buy a herring."

Ash was so angry he was losing his head. It might be a good idea to keep him that way.

"It's fun, showing how you're robbing fishermen," Don said.

"I'm paying what fish are worth this year. You can't buy fish. Nobody'd back you. Even Nevada wouldn't."

"Nevada tell you that?"

Ash hesitated just long enough for Don to suspect Sue had told him. Don had to hang onto himself.

"Sure Nevada told me," Ash said. "She thought your proposition was funny. But this isn't funny. If you don't quit making fake offers I'll run you out of town."

Ash clearly believed they were fake offers, and the longer he believed it the better.

"How do you know I'm not buying for a packer in Clarence Strait?" Don asked. "I could haul a lot of fish out of this district."

For a moment Ash was startled. "Nuts!" he said. "It's too far. Costs too much." He turned to the purse seiner. "Don't believe him. He's broke. I can prove it."

"How about this, Don?" the fisherman asked.

"Ash knows a lot of things in advance," Don said. "Knows 'em so well he could steal my Chickwan trap and get brokers to back out on loans. He even knows what Nevada thinks. So far he's been right."

"I've warned you," Ash said, and turned away.

Don watched him. It had been hard holding in.

"How about this?" the fisherman asked again.

"I told you," Don said roughly. "I'll pay for your fish."

As he turned toward shore he saw Sue come down from the street to the second float. Ash joined her and they went out to a low runabout. Don had never seen it before and it was unlike Alaskan craft. Ash helped Sue in and started the motor. They roared out of the harbor.

"Make eighteen knots," the fisherman said. "Ash gets to Sukoi Bay in ten minutes."

Don went back to the cannery. That promise he'd made to the purse seiner had brought him up sharp. And what he'd told Ash.

"Thad," he said. "Suppose Marty's got that money?"

"I'm not supposing any more," Thad said. "Just hoping."

Don paced the wharf for an hour. He knew Thad wished he hadn't asked. It wasn't anything to talk about.

THE boat came late in the afternoon. Marty Boyle stood on deck but his face told nothing. His lids covered his eyes as he climbed to the wharf.

"They're off," he said.

"What's off?" Don demanded.

"Our horse is on the rail and going into the turn two lengths to the good," Marty said.

He handed a letter to Don. A Ketchikan bank told him he could begin drawing any time on $25,000.

"A few cables fixed it," Marty said. "Don't give him his head. A horse off in front—only guts can keep him there."

Thad read the letter. He read it twice before he believed it.

"What bank did you rob?" he demanded.

"You can beat the bookies if you work harder at it than they do," Marty said.

Don felt as if his feet couldn't touch the ground.

"I got to see Nevada," he said.

With Lloyd Geary in the purse seiner, he started for the nearest bay in which Nevada had stored her traps. He didn't think he'd felt like this before in his life.

"You're skipper of this boat from now on," he said.

Lloyd grinned his pleasure. Like Don, he'd never known anything but salmon.

"Thanks for the chance," he said. "I'll get the fish."

Before dark they found Nevada's boat in a landlocked cove. Nevada came on deck as Don drew alongside.

"What new scheme you got now?" she asked when she saw his head through a window.

"Come aboard and I'll tell you," he said.

He took her into the wheelhouse and closed the door.

"I'll pay you five and a half and eleven cents," he said.

"With what?"

He showed her the letter from the bank.

"I be damned!" Nevada said when she'd read it. "You certainly are one to keep trying. Where'd you get it?"

"It's money," he said.

"And none of my business, eh? But I'm a kind o' gossipy old body. Comes from living with few people so long."

"How about your fish?"

"You were born in Alaska and I've lived here nearly forty years, which makes us pretty much alike and I can understand your drive. I like you for it. Did from the first. Any other year I'd have taken a chance on you."

"This is not taking a chance."

"Quit it! Quit it!"

It was getting dark in the wheelhouse but he could see she was disturbed.

"You're making it hard," she said. "I've tried to see a way out but I couldn't. Ash offered me five and ten."

"He's offering purse seiners and trap owners four and a half and nine," Don said. "Wait till that gets out."

"I promised I wouldn't tell."

"I'll tell it. To everyone in Tamgas."

"Yes, but— Oh, damn it all, Don! Ash was here this afternoon. I'm getting too old to battle. I told him to come and get my fish."

Running back to Tamgas that night, Don Cameron left Lloyd Geary in the wheelhouse and went to the galley to make coffee, and to be alone. He'd been sure of Nevada's fish and a big pack. Now he didn't have a chance. He felt the more bitter because Sue had been with Ash Moulton. She'd probably tipped Ash off.

Don saw that he'd have to take his loss and go purse seining. He'd reached that decision before, and then Marty Boyle had stepped in. Suddenly Don knew Marty bothered him most. If the Tamgas cannery had no chance, Marty was betting his $25,000 against nothing. Marty even stood to lose his money.

Drinking coffee, glowering at the bulkhead, Don saw what he should do, and he kept dodging it. He dodged it next morning and didn't tell Thad and Marty he'd lost Nevada's fish.

A day with fishermen on the floats brought nothing. Ash had not only attacked Don's financial status but he'd spread discouragement. Boat owners were leaving for other districts. Trap owners were stuck. Ash could make any sort of contract with them, and with Nevada's fish and Chickwan he'd put up a big pack.

At noon Nevada's boat came in and word got around that Ash had her fish. That didn't help Don, or the fishermen's depression. Don knew he was only wasting time.

AS he started ashore late in the afternoon a man called and Don turned to see Sockeye Sam Agnew painting his boat.

"What you paying for fish?" Sockeye asked.

"Five and a half for pinks. Eleven for sockeyes."

"Pretty good for a bad year. I'll sell you some."

Don stepped onto the deck and looked around.

"Where's your purse seine?" he asked.

Sockeye pointed to the open hatch. In the hold was a small heap of net with a few cork floats and lead weights. Don had seen trap seines, purse seines small enough to be run around inside a spiller, one of the two thirty-foot square web reservoirs of fish caught in a floating trap. A rope purses it at the bottom and the pirate tows away $1,000 worth of fish a trap owner has spent time and money to catch.

"Neat little rig," Sockeye said.

His face was expressionless but his eyes twinkled.

"Sell 'em to Moulton," Don said. "He doesn't care how he gets fish."

Don turned away and then thought of Nevada's traps.

"You wouldn't steal from a woman," he said.

"What you mean, steal?" Sockeye demanded. "Ain't it the law fish in the ocean belong to the man who gets 'em to market? Supposin' Nevada has a spiller full o' humpies. Ain't they in the ocean? Swimming free? Don't belong to her until she gets 'em inside a cannery. Maybe, to be real just, till they're in cans."

"I've heard that since I had ears. I don't believe it."

"You will when your crew just sits, drawing wages."

Don stepped onto the float.

"I've been hearing things," Sockeye said. "Fishermen talking. If you're worrying about fish, there's enough of us to keep you running every day. We might even crowd you."

Don grinned. Fish pirates were often boastful but he'd never seen one quite so frank.

"You seem sure of fish," Don said. "No one else is."

"A tough year for the rest is easy for us. With wages low, a trap watcher gets sore, figurin' how little he's paid. We don't have to argue with him, much."

The fish pirate grinned. He enjoyed his own frankness.

"Canners always sign an agreement not to buy from us," he said. "But a few get hard up for fish and forget. This year, with poor runs, any packer'll take all we bring him."

Don didn't argue. A small independent like himself often faced the alternative of going under or buying pirated fish.

Sockeye turned to his painting but as Don started ashore he called, "It's one way to pack some of Nevada's fish."

Don went on along the float. He felt everything was closing in around him.

He may have been very much a part of the Alaskan saga, the saga of the salmon, but Don had never thought of it in that way. He'd only felt it. All his life he'd been thinking fish, catching fish, by hand line, by deep-sea trolling, by purse seining, and he'd planned to go on to the biggest fish catching machine of all, the trap.

Now fish were shoved into the background. He had to fight men to get at the fish. Life was no longer uncomplicated. Right or wrong never entered into the simple process of hooking a big spring salmon and hauling him aboard. That was elemental. This other—Sockeye Sam had shown him a way out.

Don was confused and desperate as he turned into The Mug Up to see Joe Graham, owner of a small trap. Nevada Baird sat at her usual place. Across the table was Marty Boyle, leaning forward, head tilted far back. Both were laughing and it startled Don. He'd never seen Marty smile.

"Sit down," Nevada said. "You know Siwash. What's this bird talking about?"

"It's a parlay I had once," Marty said. "One of them things that pop right out of a dope sheet 'long three in the morning. A chance you get once in ten years. Only I earned it."

"How you mean, earned it?"

"By keeping track of every horse that ever stepped out of a paddock. Like I told you, knowing one horse got over the colic and the other standing in the mud for six months. But the bookies don't know and on them two I run a hundred bucks into nine thousand. And I've got something the bookies ain't in the sixth."

IT was a long story, and Don scarcely listened. Marty bet his nine thousand on a crazy horse ridden by a half-baked apprentice, a deadly combination of which the

bookies knew nothing. "The bookies offered fifteen to one, but soon's my money showed, how they wore out chalk! All they did was rub and write. The horse won by nine lengths and the bookies took it to the stewards—it was that kind of track—and Marty, who stood to win $41,000, left with $9,000."

Nevada snorted. "Salmon have got that beat," she said. "And you got to know all about 'em same as horses. Like Don figured out Chickwan." She faced Don, suddenly alert. "Going to get enough fish?" she asked.

"What you mean, steal?" Sockeye demanded. "Ain't it the law fish in the ocean belong to the man who gets 'em to market?"

Don started. He'd been thinking of Sockeye.

"I'll get by," he said gruffly.

He could feel her bright little eyes boring in and wondered how much they uncovered. Nothing about fish, nothing about Tamgas, that she didn't know.

Nevada emptied her glass and looked out the window.

"I've been wondering how you come to make a bet on fish, Marty," she said. "You sit up all night figuring horses, but you never saw a fish outside a can."

Don spun around. "Marty tell you he's in on this?" he demanded.

"Tamgas is a small place," she said. "You raised that money in such a hurry it had to be him."

"I wasn't betting just on these two-year-old pinks," Marty said. "There's times, with other things equal, when you lay your money on the jock. The kid here—I figured he wouldn't pull out of a pocket and go around. He'd go through."

"You never saw a fish and I never saw a horse run," Nevada said, "but we seem to be a couple o' tillicums. Only—did you count the legs on the horse you picked to win?"

Don shoved back, knocking beer bottles off the table.

"So you've been stringing me along!" he said. "Been playing with Ash all the time. Peddling things to him like Sue does. Now you're telling Marty he's put his money on a sure loser. Why can't you tend to your own business?"

"Shut up!" Nevada said.

She wasn't indignant or resentful, or even ruffled.

"I haven't peddled—" she began.

"To hell with that!" Don said, and he stormed out of The Mug Up.

He took the whole thing back to the cannery and fought it, all Marty had said, all that had happened. He fought it through a silent supper with the crew. Marty wasn't there.

"He's eatin' with Nevada," Thad said. "I saw 'em going up the hill together."

Don didn't care where Marty was. He had $25,000 and he could put up a pack. The $25,000 belonged to a queer little man who must have been hard as nails all his life. No one had asked him in. When Don finally went to sleep he'd decided to keep on, run the string out, and to hell with anybody else. It was his only chance.

But when he wakened next morning everything was astonishingly clear. It was as if the whole question had been taken out of his hands. He called Thad and Marty into the office.

"I haven't touched a cent of your money," he said to Marty. "Get it out of the bank and get the hell out of Alaska."

Marty's eyes seemed tight shut.

"I like it here," he said.

"Lloyd Geary will take you to Ketchikan."

"The bet's down," Marty said.

"You've got nothing to bet on. I'm closing the cannery." Don was in it now and felt better. "When you put up this money you thought I had Nevada's fish. I don't get 'em. You've got no chance. You never had a chance. Which makes it no bet."

Don turned to Thad, who stood gaping.

"Tell the crew I'm through," he said.

"If it had been a sure thing it wouldn't a been a bet," Marty said. "And I don't let anyone welch on me."

"Nobody's welching," Don said.

"You are. This is no sprint. It's over the jumps. Any horse in the race can fall and break his neck. What in hell's the matter with you?"

Don wondered if there were something the matter. He'd always won until now.

"Any kid who can parlay a rowboat into twenty thousand can do it again," Marty said. "Like I told Nevada, I'm betting on the jock."

"A bad year and you'll lose all your money."

"The money's down. Make a race of it."

Don took a long breath. "I've told you," he said. "Maybe all you'll get out of this is a fight. But you'll get that."

Marty nodded and went out.

"I'll have thirty thousand cases of cans in four days," Thad said. "That's a lot of cans."

THAD too departed and Don sat thinking it over. He felt curiously free. He was even exultant. Something had been dragging at him since he'd opened the cannery. Defeat had always been climbing over the stern. Now nothing seemed to matter except that he go on and win.

He was still feeling that way when he went into the town and saw Sue come

from the post office, reading a letter, smiling. He'd be seeing Sue every day, he thought. In a place so small, with one short street—even if she needed only to buy a spool of thread he'd see her. If he stayed in Tamgas.

Sue folded the letter, still smiling, unaware of him. For a few seconds he was seeing Sue as she was, and those seconds he felt he knew her completely. He knew he had to stay in Tamgas.

Nevada joined Sue and they came toward him. Don walked with a swing that was almost a swagger. These two might connive with Ash but he felt he could put up a pack regardless.

He stopped before them, smiling, confident. Sue looked at him with frank surprise, Nevada shrewdly. Then the older woman cocked an ear to the sound of can machinery.

"You're making cans," she said.

"What'd I put the fish in?" Don asked.

"Huh!" Nevada said after a quick glance. "All right, but tell me – this brother of Thad's—queerest bird I ever saw in Alaska. Does he do anything but bet on horses?"

"You can ask him," Don said. "I wouldn't."

Nevada looked up indignantly, then smiled. "Fair enough," she said. "I like the codger. He staying all summer?"

"Never heard him say."

Maybe he'd been too rough with Nevada in The Mug Up but he wasn't telling her anything, or Sue.

"First time I got spanked on the main street of Tamgas," Nevada said. "Maybe I deserve it, and maybe you're wrong."

"I've quit being wrong," Don said.

He looked at Sue, and he no longer smiled.

"I was wrong about you," he said. "I knew it after you hustled Ash to close a deal with Nevada."

Sue was furious but before she could speak he said, "You cost her half a cent on pinks and a cent on sockeyes. Money Ash will get. That's a raw deal to hand Nevada."

"I did nothing of the sort!" Sue cried.

"You told Ash I was looking for Nevada. You told him Nevada had turned down my proposition."

Suddenly Don was angry too and he stepped closer.

"You wouldn't stay married to me," he said. "Maybe you had a good reason. But why you bucking me now? Why you siding with a crook? Why don't you—"

"That's a lie! Ash—"

"He stole my trap. He's gouging fishermen. He's robbed Nevada of five thousand dollars. And you play his game."

Sue started away but he caught her arm.

"You're my wife," he said. "Call yourself Cameron. Maybe you don't like it but how do you think I do?"

Don stopped. It had come bursting out of him, and somehow he was glad.

"Ash is not a crook!" Sue cried.

"I'll prove it if he doesn't prove it first," Don said. "Or don't you care if he is a crook?"

That stopped her. She was more startled than angry.

"I knew what you were once," Don said. "But what are you now? All I can go by is what you do, and nothing I've seen looks good."

CHAPTER VI

ROUND TWO COMING UP

THAD BOYLE came into the office. The cannery was quiet and Don knew the job of converting knockdown cans into finished receptacles was done.

"Thirty thousand cases," Thad said.

"It may be enough," Don said.

"Why you so cocky? Made a deal with Sockeye and his gang?"

"It can be done."

"Whose fish he offering? Nevada's?"

"And today he mentioned Chickwan."

Thad frowned. No one connected with salmon canning approves of pirating.

"All right," Thad said suddenly. "So why not go the whole hog and pirate some yourself?"

"No," Don said.

"Chickwan—you'd be stealing your own fish."

Don started. "It's an idea," he said.

"You can't put ideas in cans."

Thad went out and Don paced the office. The Chickwan humpies were his. They'd never have been spawned if he hadn't cleaned out the river. And since his return to Alaska he'd been defending himself. He'd never had to do that before.

Suddenly he ran out to the cannery wharf and jumped aboard the *Skookum*.

The crew had gone ashore but Lloyd Geary lay in his bunk reading.

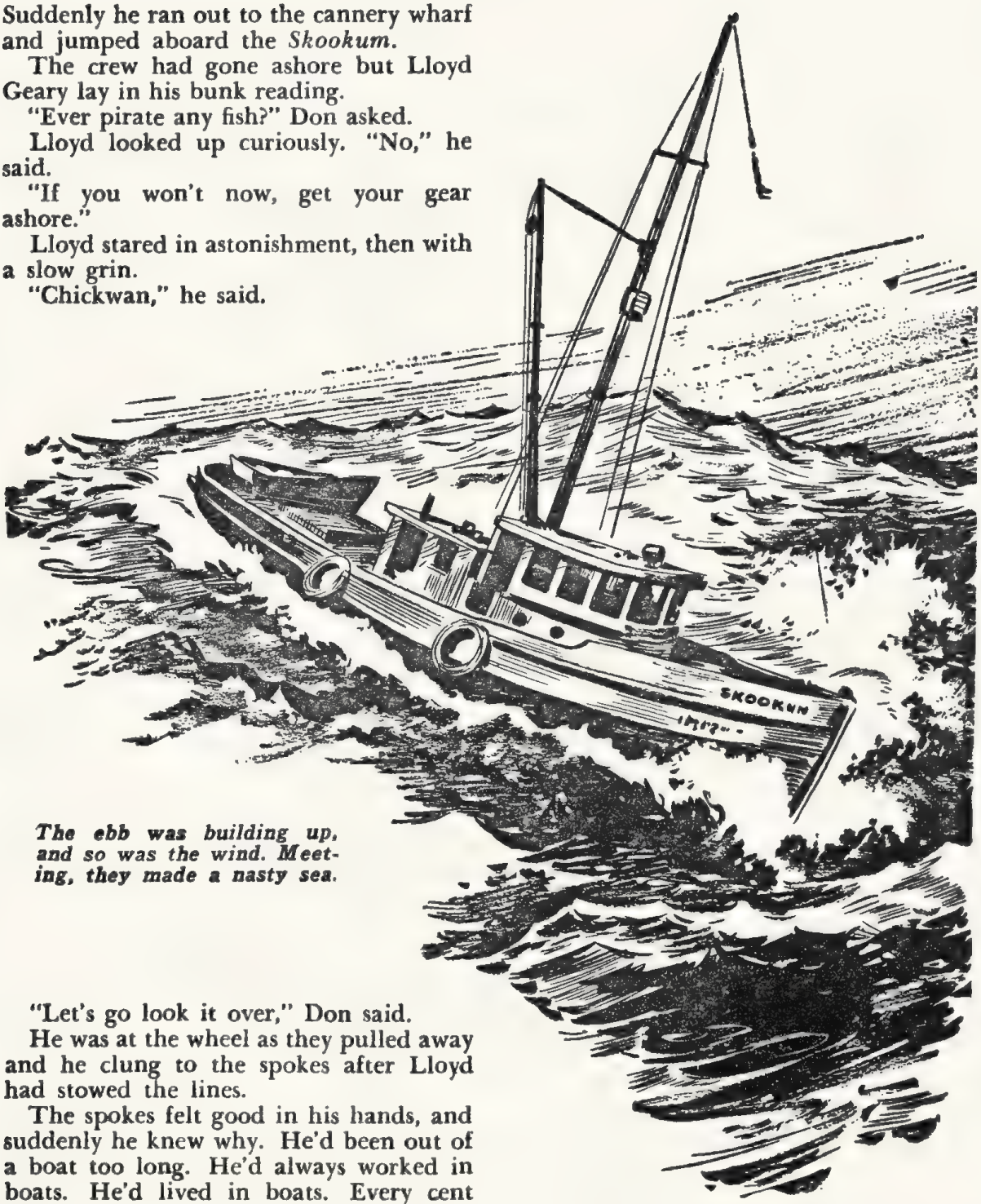
"Ever pirate any fish?" Don asked.

Lloyd looked up curiously. "No," he said.

"If you won't now, get your gear ashore."

Lloyd stared in astonishment, then with a slow grin.

"Chickwan," he said.



The ebb was building up, and so was the wind. Meeting, they made a nasty sea.

"Let's go look it over," Don said.

He was at the wheel as they pulled away and he clung to the spokes after Lloyd had stowed the lines.

The spokes felt good in his hands, and suddenly he knew why. He'd been out of a boat too long. He'd always worked in boats. He'd lived in boats. Every cent he'd ever had was earned in a boat. And, he thought, he'd never been licked in a boat.

He liked swinging the wheel over and turning out of the harbor. He liked the vibration of the gas engine, the gray waters of the channel ahead, the islands that were mountains rising from the sea. This was it, this was home, where he belonged. And this was where he could fight.

"Ever hear about Chickwan?" he asked.

"I've even heard Ash tell his side of it," Lloyd said.

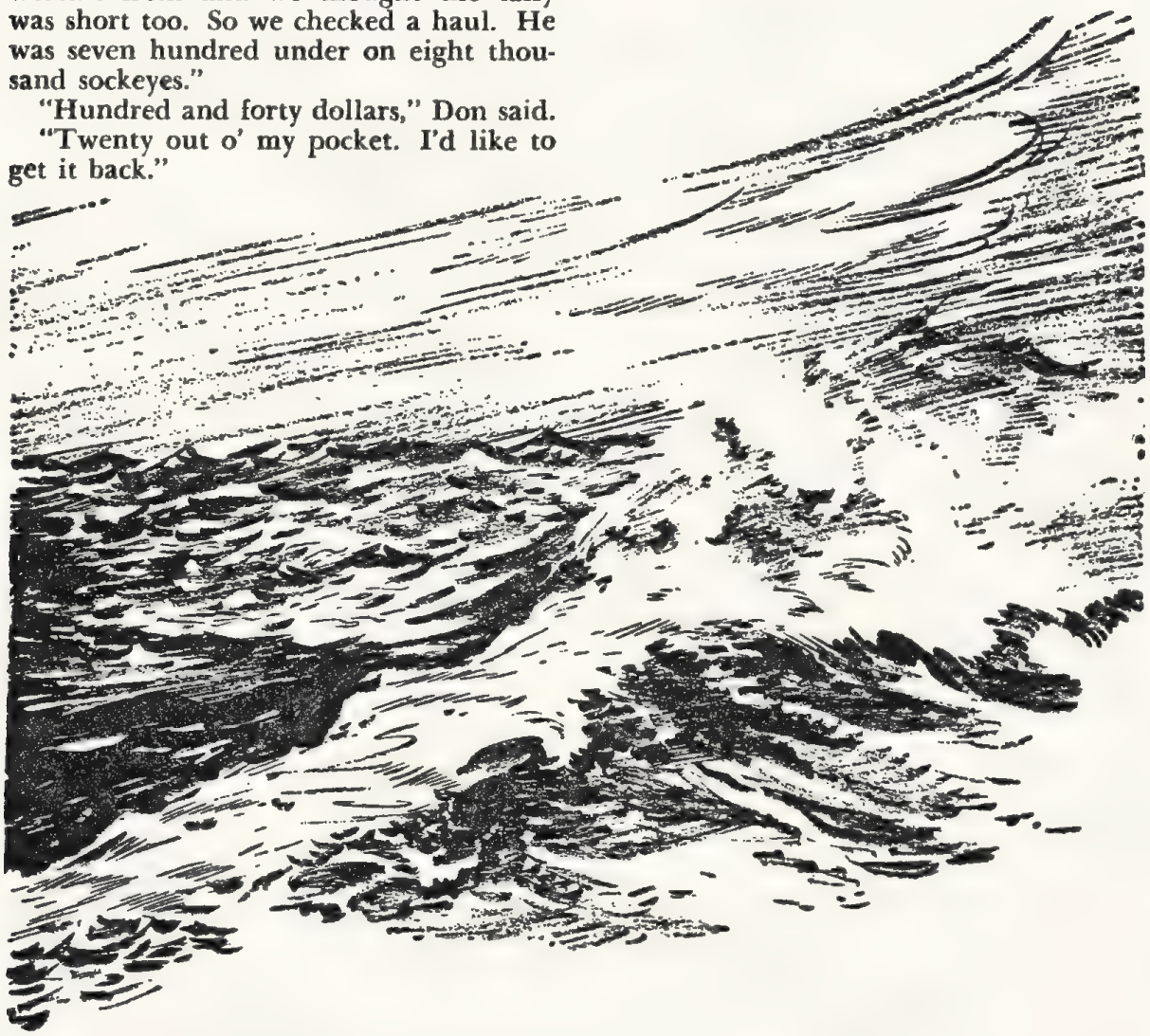
"He's got no side! No more'n any thief has."

Don didn't speak for a while. The cannery had taken so much of his time and thought, Chickwan had stayed in the back of his mind. Now it was out in front.

"The boat I was in last year sold to Ash," Lloyd said. "Once he claimed fish weren't fresh and we thought the tally was short too. So we checked a haul. He was seven hundred under on eight thousand sockeyes."

"Hundred and forty dollars," Don said.

"Twenty out o' my pocket. I'd like to get it back."



The *Skookum* shook herself along at better than seven knots, her big square stern high out of water. The sea was quiet in the lee of an island. To the north they could see whitecaps, and clouds drove low along the mountainsides, but neither spoke of the southeaster that was making up. They'd known southeasters all their lives.

A roar that rumbled strangely came from astern and they looked out to see Ash Moulton's runabout shoot past. Sue Cameron sat beside Ash and a man was in the stern. Sue started when she saw Don and then turned to Ash.

"Suppose he's going to Chickwan?" Don asked.

"He'll be there and back before we get to the Indian village," Lloyd said.

"But that thing they're in—an ironing board with an engine tacked on. Surprise Passage, the ebb running—"

Anger cut him off. Ash had no business taking Sue into dirty water in that sort of boat. Sue was an Alaskan and knew boats and weather. But, Don thought bitterly, she'd take a chance just to be with Ash.

"They're taking Bart Stevens to a trap," Lloyd said. "He couldn't find work and Ash got him as a watchman for eighty dollars.

AN HOUR later they turned into Surprise Passage. The ebb was building up, and so was the wind. Meeting, they made a nasty sea, but the *Skookum* wallowed

along, though spray went over the wheelhouse. In another hour they could see the Indian village. Lloyd stuck his head out a door between sheets of spray.

"That's no ironing board," he said. "Ash has been to Chickwan and now he's coming back."

Water drained from a window and Don caught a glimpse of Ash's runabout. It was near the east shore and they'd pass close. Lloyd looked out the door again.

"It is an ironing board," he said. "It's stopped."

Don pulled the throttle wide open and cursed the spray that drenched the windows. The *Skookum* shivered and lunged.

"He's only slowed down," Lloyd reported. "Looking ashore. I see! One of those little dugout canoes. An Indian in it. Waving both arms. Lost his paddle. And look at the rips ahead of him!"

"Reefs," Don said. "Tide's taking him into 'em."

He slowed down as he approached the runabout and stuck his head out the door.

"I draw too much to go in there!" he shouted. "You can."

Ash shook his head. His slow-turning motor carried him on. Don swung around and came alongside.

"I can't," Ash shouted. "Not with Sue."

"I'll take her aboard."

"No. A man'd be a fool to try it."

Sue stared up at Don. He looked at her.

"So you like 'em crooked and you like 'em yellow!" he said.

He ducked into the wheelhouse, opened the throttle and swung the bow into the seas.

"Take her," he said to Lloyd. "I'll go in with the skiff."

He ran aft, unlashed the light rowboat, wedged the oars under the seat and shoved it across the roller on the turntable. Ash opened his throttles and roared away, but when Don jumped into the skiff he saw Sue looking back.

A half hour later he hauled an old Indian aboard. The man was nearly dead from exposure but Lloyd had a bottle of whiskey, and a big slug, and hot coffee beside the galley stove, brought him around before they reached the Indian village.

"You cut it close," Lloyd said when they were headed down channel to Chickwan Cove.

"An oar hit a rock once," Don said. "Ash coulda gone in there easy."

"Ash couldn't," Lloyd said.

They found Bart Stevens in the tiny cabin set above the log frame at a corner of a spiller of Ash's floating trap, getting his gear in shape and cursing Ash.

"Cramping me like this to save a few feet o' lumber!"

Don looked over the trap. Chickwan Cove was ideal for a floater. It was really two coves, one inside the other, with the trap off a point separating the two. Beyond the face of the trap, to the west, the channel was filled with reefs and kelp. Salmon heading for the river would take the east side, where the lead, fast to shore, would turn them into the trap.

Don had known all this but now, seeing a trap in place, he understood what an efficient, and deadly, contrivance it was. If Ash cheated on the 36-hour closed period each week-end, and Ash would, he'd take nearly every fish headed for the river. Ash would kill the odd-year runs.

Running back to Tamgas, while they fought the wheel in a following sea, Don spoke of that. His anger, he realized, was not so much because of loss of the trap as against Ash for killing a run Don's efforts had made possible.

"Ash must know that," Lloyd said. "And if he's throwing away twenty-five thousand dollars a year just to take a couple o' hundred thousand fish this season, he must be hard up."

"He claims he ain't," Don said.

"Then why's he turning the screws down on fishermen and his own men?"

"Everybody getting wages like Bart?"

"And worse. With fifty canneries closed, Ash can do it." Lloyd chuckled. "The damned fool. If his other trap watchers are like Bart, a pirate can go there in daylight and empty both spillers. If there'd been fish today, we coulda brought 'em home."

"Which means we can go in there easy."

"Any time. Bart's the sort who likes to hold a grudge, and work on it."

"Ash has five traps," Don said.

NEXT day he made a final effort to sign on purse seiners, but those who had not hooked up with him or Ash were leaving for districts where more canners would

compete for fish. In mid-afternoon Don knew he could go no further. He had three purse seiners besides his own and Halmar Jensen's trap, and nothing more.

While Don was on the floats, Ash arrived from Sukoi Bay, swirling into the harbor at high speed and making a landing with a flourish. The wash of his craft set boats to rolling and banged them against floats. Fishermen cursed but Don knew their anger wouldn't get him any fish. He knew he would get enough fish only through Sockeye Sam and raids on Chickwan.

He didn't like it. He didn't want to buy from pirates and he didn't want to take fish from Chickwan, which by rights were his own. And all this, everything that had happened, had been due to Ash Moulton.

Don's rage mounted as he walked ashore, and he didn't feel any better when he saw Ash and Sue leave Nevada's house up the draw. That was another thing he didn't like, Sue trotting around with this bird, going out in that fool boat with him. Don didn't think he was jealous. He just thought the whole set-up was wrong and he should do something about it.

He hurried ashore and up the lane to Nevada's house. At a bend he waited, and in a moment they came. They didn't see him and in his rage he was only dimly aware they were not talking, not laughing, that they did not walk together in the intimate manner he'd noticed.

They saw him then but both appeared not to. They were about to pass when Don stepped in front.

"Go home, Sue," he said. "I'm talking to Ash."

"I won't!" she said. "I'm—"

"All right. Then listen. Moulton, I'm living in this town. I'm going to keep on living here. And you're staying away from my wife. All the way away."

He heard Sue gasp but he didn't look at her as Ash stepped back and stood ready.

"Maybe she wants to run around with you," Don said. "I don't know what goes on in her head. But long's she's my wife she's not parading in Tamgas with a man who's not only a crook but who's yellow besides."

Ash took a deep breath and his hands became fists.

"Sue was a damned fine girl once," Don said. "Maybe she still is. I wouldn't know. But the kind she was, and the kind you are —I'm not standing for it long's I got the right to do something."

"What are you going to do?" Ash asked.

"I'll show you now."

"Run along, Sue," Ash said.

"I'm not running from anything!" she said.

He couldn't help but glance at her, though he knew it might be fatal. Ash had pulled a trick in Ketchikan, but Don didn't think so big a man could be so swift. Ash seemed to spring from both feet, a haymaker swinging with all the added force of his leap behind it. Don ducked and, as in Ketchikan, not enough. The blow, on top of his head, sent him stumbling backward.

Ash came on through, weight and lunges behind his blows. Don went down from sheer power, not because he was knocked down, and as he rolled away Ash jumped in, swinging a heavy foot.

"Ash!" Sue cried.

If Ash heard he didn't stop. Don rolled farther, then swiftly back. He jerked a leg from under Ash, tried to get onto his feet first. He did, but Ash came up at once with a rock in his right hand.

"Yellow and dirty," Don said, and started in.

Something came between him and Ash. It was blurred by his rage and he was shoving it aside when a stinging slap on his face and a strange voice stopped him.

"Quit it! This is my street. If I can't walk home without running into a brawl between two—Ash! Drop that rock! You're bigger'n Don. Why can't you fight fair?"

Nevada Baird stood between them, and though she was small and old and a woman, she stood there like a beach boulder. She dimmed even Don's rage.

"I saw you!" she said to Ash. "Kicking a man when he's down. Can't you fight Alaska style?"

"I didn't start it," Ash said. "Sue'll tell you. Why'd I be messing in anything like this when I've got to get to Ketchikan and catch the boat for Seattle?"

"Get going then," Nevada said. "Sue, what you doing here?"

Ash departed at once, hurrying down the lane to the floats. She turned and went back up the slope. Nevada looked at Don.

"You got to fight dirty sometimes," she said. "Got to fit your fight to who you're fighting. It's the way I do it. So next time

you see Sockeye, tell him there's a thirty-thirty in the shack on each of my traps. And tell him they're loaded and they've got hair triggers."

She turned and followed Sue, but after a few steps she stopped.

"Why don't you grab a rock?" she called back.

CHAPTER VII

GAME FISH SWIM UPSTREAM

PINK salmon started running in the Tamgas district about July first. Sometimes they were early or late by a week or more. Fishermen and packers had various explanations, such as tides, southeast gales, the moon and odd and even years.

"I never checked close," Nevada said, "but they always come. Harder on the nerves when they're late, is all."

"Like when a actor cuts up and it takes five minutes to get 'em away," Marty said.

Don didn't know what that meant and didn't care. He signaled to Charley for more beer. He was excited, thinking the fish might come any day now. And Thad was ready for them. Thad had taken care of everything. With fifty canneries closed, he'd been able to pick and choose among the few Chinese, the Jap slimers, Indian women who packed fish in cans and Filipino boys who handled the finished product. All Thad's white crew were experts.

They needed only fish, and Don hadn't found them, unless he depended on Sockeye Sam and his gang and on Chickwan. And he'd made up his mind he'd take anything he could get, take it any way he could get it. He'd been the victim of Ash's tricks, he'd been on the defensive long enough. He was going all out to win, hit first every time he got a chance.

Charley filled their glasses.

"It's cockeyed to me," Marty said. "You never saw 'em but you're sure they're coming."

"I hope you see 'em soon so you'll quit saying that," Nevada said. "How many cans you make, Don?"

"Not enough," he said.

He'd been seeing Nevada nearly every day and a peculiar truce existed. Don couldn't make her out. Lloyd Geary and all the fishermen swore by her. She frequently displayed an interest in Don's cannery but he never told her anything. She was selling her fish to Ash and naturally she wanted Ash to succeed. Don couldn't help admiring her but he didn't trust her, especially when she seemed to be prying into his affairs.

"You've got only Halmar's trap," she said now. "Can't expect much from purse seiners this year. It'll be scratch fishing and they'll cork each other all season."

"Cork?" Marty said, and he leaned forward to get a new fact about the salmon fishery.

Nevada laughed indulgently. Nearly every afternoon she and the horse player sat in The Mug Up. Don wondered what they had in common. They didn't even speak the same language.

"You get more ignorant every day," Nevada said. "Take a bunch of boats hanging around waiting for fish. One sees 'em and begins to make a set. Before he can more'n start, another boat makes a set between him and the fish, and then another and another, until the fish are scared and nobody gets any."

"Ain't you got any rules?" Marty demanded.

"One. A fish in the ocean belongs to the man who takes it. A skipper will cork his best friend and laugh at him."

"You can cork a trap too," Don said.

Nevada looked at him sharply. "Meaning?" she said.

"A trap's spotted where it'll get the most fish coming through a channel," Don said to Marty. "If a purse seiner makes a set just below, he gets fish that woulda been caught in the trap."

"You with no traps and me with four," Nevada said. "You're only trying to bother an old woman. Or you just feeling brash?"

"I'm feeling no different."

"Then you ain't seen the Ketchikan paper that came today."

She laid it before him, pointed to a headline. Enos Slocum, the broker, had failed, was wiped out clean.

Don read with growing excitement. Alaska would feel the failure. Packers backed by Slocum were left on the beach. There might be new financing but the fish were due any day. He shoved the paper back with trembling hands.

"I've been looking for Ash," he said. "This why I haven't seen him?"

"He left for Seattle the day I met you two in the lane with Sue," Nevada said.

Don's mind raced on. Slocum was to advance Ash $40,000. And Ash had played everything close, like a man trying to squeeze through. For the first time since he'd come to Tamgas, Don saw a chance to do what he'd set out to do. He might still wreck Ash Moulton.

"Ash is all right," Nevada said. "He come out of last season well fixed, if he did lose a couple o' canneries."

"You mean he tells it that way!" Don said. "You seen his money? Why's he paying low wages and fish prices? Why'd he make you lie about what he's paying you? Why'd he use dirty tricks to get me out of Tamgas? And what good's your contract with him now? How you know your fish count will be right?"

Nevada took it all in, and Don knew he had jolted her.

"Now, with me in a jam," she said, "you're going after all my fish you can get."

"I've been in a jam since I hit Tamgas," he said.

Nevada studied him. She wasn't angry. She even smiled.

"I take back what I said about being old," she said. "I ain't—yet."

DON grinned. She was all Alaskan. She drank her beer and Marty tilted his head back to watch her. The smooth pink face had hardened. Her eyes no longer twinkled.

"Maybe Ash is in a jam too," she said. "You didn't help him any, telling how he wouldn't go after that Indian."

"I haven't said a word about it except to Ash," Don said. "But two others saw him, Lloyd and Sue."

"Sue hasn't opened her mouth. She hasn't said much of anything since then. So it was Lloyd, and every man jack in Tamgas is telling how Ash wouldn't take a chance. Know who that old Indian was?"

"Jimmy John's father, they said."

"And Jimmy John tipped off Chickwan to Ash. But you get something out of it. Ash signed up a bunch of Surprise Passage Indian women for his cannery and now not a one'll work for him. Ash is gone and he's got only a few packers."

"I hope his fish rot," Don said. "And those women are working for me."

"Nice disposition, you've got. I hear you took a big chance going after the old boy."

"I was in worse rips when I was fifteen. Ash, drawing so little, coulda gone in there easy."

Nevada laughed and turned to Marty. "You sure hit a fine season to bet on them two-year-old pinks," she said. "This is no race. It's a dog fight. But I'm a tough old—"

The air whistle of a gas boat began yelping in the harbor. The few men in The Mug Up jumped to their feet. Nevada snorted like an old fire horse.

Then it came, a blast from the cannery whistle. Men crowded to the door, Don in the lead.

"They're off!" Nevada cried.

Outside, they saw Don's purse seiner, the *Skookum,* swinging around the point to the cannery wharf. Don wanted to run. He was going to pack fish.

The *Skookum* was tied up when he reached the wharf and the crew was already pitching fish into the hoist. Half the town gathered and the excitement was like that of July Fourth. Don was the most excited of all. Something about the stream of silver bodies moving up to the fish house set him to tingling all over. He'd seen millions of salmon, but these salmon were different. They were going into his own cans.

Nevada and Marty came and stood beside him.

"Where'd you get 'em?" Nevada asked Lloyd Geary.

Lloyd had climbed to the wharf. He hesitated, then said bluntly, "Below your Number Three trap."

"What'd I lose—eight thousand?"

"I figure seventy-five hundred."

"And I've known you since you were a baby!"

Lloyd flushed. When he started to speak she stopped him.

"No law against it. Only—leave me enough to eat on."

She departed abruptly.

"I didn't exactly cork her trap," Lloyd said. "I was maybe a quarter of a mile below. But she'da got most of 'em."

"They were in the ocean," Don said. "Swimming free."

Nevada Baird

"Yeah, but Nevada—always helping a feller out of a hole—it gave me a dirty feeling."

That started the machines and Don hurried inside to watch the first fish go through the header, which cut off head and tail, and into the Iron Chink, which removed fins and entrails and split it down the back. He'd seen this many times but now it was his cannery and they were his fish, and as that first fish went on to the sliming table, where Japs waited to scrape out the blood, Don got an idea.

He followed the fish to the washing and inspection tables, on along a conveyor to a machine belt that cut it into pieces the length of a can, on to long tables where Indian women waited to pack the pieces.

A murmur rose above the sound of the machines. Women looked at him and smiled. Some waved their white gloves. One old woman caught his hand. Don understood enough of what they said to know they were talking about Jimmy John's father. He hurried on.

He saw the first can packed, saw it go through the automatic weighing machine, on into the vacuum machine, which extracted the air and crimped the top in place. When the first can popped out, Don grabbed it. He carried it to the Filipino boss, waiting with his crew to wash the cans, put them in trays and wheel them to the cooking retorts.

"Keep this separate," Don said as he marked it with a file. "When it's cooked and cooled, give it to me."

THE crew worked until after ten o'clock. No one objected. The season had opened. Into the next six or eight weeks the work of a year would be crammed. Excitement increased when the crews heard the tooting of a purse seiner and knew they'd have more work in the morning. All had expected disaster, and they were off to a good start.

After the machines stopped, Don went into the office. Marty was talking to Lloyd Geary.

"He's pumped me dry about fish," Lloyd said. "Wants to go seining tomorrow."

"If you think the Chickwan run has started, he can go tonight," Don said.

"It won't do any harm to go look," Lloyd said.

Two boats were getting underway as they left the harbor. Outside they overtook Sockeye Sam's craft. Don wondered if Nevada had put a thirty-thirty on each of her traps and would have watchmen who'd use them. He wondered too if the pirates were heading for Chickwan, and opened the throttle. He didn't want anyone ahead of him there.

After a while Lloyd went below to get some sleep and left Marty and Don in the wheelhouse. Marty didn't ask his usual questions about fish. He wanted to know boats now, and how Don found his way in the dark. Then he began talking about Nevada.

"I've seen women around tracks, some owners," he said. "But she's different. She lays bets that would curl those dames' hair. Don't work any angles. Square!"

"Yeah?" Don said.

"You have her wrong. I get the idea she's just sitting in the stands and watching you run. And no bet on you."

"But if Ash don't pull through she loses money. And long's I'm in Tamgas, Ash can lose. So be careful what you tell her."

"I've never told anybody anything yet," Marty said.

They reached Chickwan Cove before one o'clock. Don slid in quietly. He and

Lloyd stood in the doors, watching the blackness beneath the mountains. Except for the regulation lantern on the trap, they saw no signs of life.

"Bart likes his sleep," Lloyd said. "Go on in."

They drew alongside the face of the trap. Two of the crew made fast and Lloyd went to the shack. Don waited. For all Lloyd's confidence that Bart Stevens could be handled, the man might raise a ruckus. If they had to overpower him he might tell Ash what had happened.

Lloyd came back. "Bart's had a hard day," he said. "He just can't get up this time o' night. And he says the humpies been coming in so fast he thought they'd take the trap right out from under him."

Don switched on the deck floodlight and one of the crew turned it into the spiller. He expressed his awe in curses.

"Get the hatch off," Don said. "Start brailing."

But when he went aft and looked down in the clear sea water he stopped and stared, and he could not curse. The thirty-foot square web box was crammed with a solid mass of salmon.

"They'll keep the cannery running two days!" Lloyd exclaimed.

Marty clung to a stay and looked down. Twice he tried to speak. "It just ain't so!" he said at last. "It just ain't!"

The crew attached the big scoop to a line from the boom and with the long pole thrust it down and under the fish. Lloyd threw in the clutch and the scoop came up, filled with salmon that squirmed and flapped violently. The boom swung in and the scoop was lowered into the hold. It came up empty and the action was repeated.

Don watched. They were his fish, fish that never would have lived if it had not been for what he'd done four years ago. They'd have gone into Ash Moulton's cans if he hadn't come. Now—

A third scoop load was dumped into the hold. These fish, as Don had planned it, would have gone upriver to the splendid spawning beds. They'd have laid countless eggs, and in two years the fish of those eggs would have come back by the hundreds of thousands. They would have insured the Chickwan one of the finest runs of pink salmon on the coast, and in both odd and even years.

A fourth scoop was lifted from the spiller. Don heard fish flopping in the hold. They'd be dead soon. They'd never spawn. And that wasn't what he'd planned. It wasn't what he wanted. He'd had a vision of what Chickwan could be, and now he was helping to ruin the odd-year runs.

He saw more than that. If he wrecked Ash, got his trap back, he wanted that trap as he'd lost it. If he didn't get the trap, Ash would—

"Swing her across!" he shouted. "Dump 'em on the other side."

Lloyd threw a lever and the fish hung there in the scoop squirming, dripping.

"Do what?" he demanded. "You crazy?"

"Dump 'em," Don said. "On the other side. And empty the spiller. The other spiller too. I'm not taking these fish. I'm letting 'em go to the river."

Still Lloyd didn't move. A fisherman muttered, and Don knew what he meant. The men would receive more than $100 each for the night's work if the fish were taken to the cannery.

"Dump 'em!" Don said harshly. "I'm not ruining the run after giving it a chance. This trap belongs to me by rights and I'm going to get it back. You'll get wages for tonight. Good wages, and nothing more. Dump 'em, Lloyd."

Lloyd dumped them. "Look," he said when the fish had cascaded into the sea. "If that's the way you want it, let's open the spillers. Save all this work."

"Open 'em," Don said.

Marty came close. He wouldn't understand. He'd ask ten questions.

"So you're betting on two years from now," he said. "On getting your trap back."

"That's it," Don said.

"They'd help, packin' 'em this year. Might pull you through."

Meaning, Don thought, that he ought to take the fish, that he owed it to Marty.

"I'm no pirate," Don said. "But these are my fish. I can do as I please with them."

"Sure. If you start a parlay you got to see it through."

Marty walked forward, and then he came back.

"My bet's down," he said. "Nobody told me to lay it. And I never yet slipped a word to the boy on the horse."

CHAPTER VIII

LAST CHANCE

THE *Skookum* returned to Tamgas before the day's work had begun in the cannery, but already Sockeye Sam Agnew and another pirate had made fast at the wharf.

Sockeye looked mean and ugly, as on the day Halmar Jensen had thrown him out of The Mug Up. Don understood when he saw Sockeye's wheelhouse. A window was broken, unmistakably by a bullet. Another bullet had plowed across the front.

"Get nicked?" Don asked.

"How'd you know about it?" Sockeye demanded suspiciously.

Don pointed to the window.

"Works for Nevada," Sockeye said. "Shot soon's he saw us."

"I don't blame her. These Moulton fish?"

"His watchmen are sore's hell, like I told you. But they're making us pay their wages."

"You birds get a raw deal," Don said. "But get this too. I'm buying from you only because I like to stuff Ash Moulton's fish into my cans."

"Damned righteous, ain't you?"

"No. I don't like Moulton because he's a crook. I don't like any kind of crook."

Don walked away. He'd get 25,000 pink salmon from the two pirates. With other fish brought in, he'd fill 3,000 cases before the season was more than three days old. And at Chickwan he had released fish that would have filled 2,000 cases for Ash.

But he didn't think of them in that way. Those 30,000 fish had proved he'd been right four years ago. He had made it possible for a million salmon to leave the spawning grounds each year.

After the pirates' catch was in the fish house, Don paid off the two boats. The money was the first he'd drawn on the $25,000 Marty had advanced. Marty could have raised hell about freeing the Chickwan fish. They might have swung the balance between success and failure.

Don decided to explain his action to Marty, but he could scarcely explain it to himself. Deep down he knew it wasn't Ash who had prompted his decision. It was the Chickwan salmon's right to spawn, a right he had given them.

This sounded so cockeyed he decided to keep still. But he felt a new exhilaration. He felt too, and it was strange, that only Nevada Baird would understand.

The cannery was humming now. The crew would work until late that night and Don was busy. When Marty came for supper he took Don to the office.

"Moulton came back from Seattle this morning," Marty said. "He got his mail and left for his cannery in Sukoi Bay."

"You see him?" Don asked.

"He wasn't smiling in that cocky way. Guy's worried. Bad. When he came back later he headed for Nevada's."

Don stiffened. He'd made a promise about Ash and Sue.

"Only he met Nevada on the street," Marty said. "How he laid it out. Talking and waving his arms and pounding his fist in his hand. And all the time Nevada stands and looks across the harbor. She don't say a word hardly."

"What'd Nevada tell you?"

"She never tells me anything, like I never tell her. We just argue over what's the best bet, a fish or a horse."

NEXT afternoon the cannery was still busy when Don went up the street. Nevada, at her usual window in The Mug Up, beckoned. He found the place deserted.

"Charley don't make much money when fish are running," she said. "You seem to be doing all right."

"Fair," Don said.

"Huh! Running every day and half the nights."

"It's a slow crew."

"Not talking, eh? How'd you like to buy Chickwan?"

"Buy it!" Don said.

"That got you. Ash offered it to me for ten thousand."

Don sat very still.

"I don't want it," she said. "Ash's tender was in last night. I've known Ed Watson, her skipper, for twenty-five years. Yesterday he got less'n a thousand Chickwan humpies."

She looked steadily at Don.

"Ed didn't get anything from two of Ash's traps yesterday and little from the others," she said. "Watchmen told him purse seiners have been corking 'em."

Don knew she was leading him into

something, or telling what she knew. He waited.

"So you won't buy Chickwan," she said.

"I paid for it once," he said.

Nevada drank her beer. "Where I live I can see most everything going on," she said. "I'm up early. See boats go out and come in. I can tell close to how many fish they've got. But it's too far to see bullet holes in a wheelhouse."

Don stared, unblinking.

"I've got good trap watchers," she said. "Got to take 'em grub tomorrow. Bart Stevens wanted a job but I was full up. You can depend on Bart if you treat him right."

"I wouldn't know," Don said.

He did know she was trying to trap him, or let him see she knew everything that was going on. He could play that game too.

"Ash was trying to borrow money from you yesterday," he said, leaning across the table. "Couldn't he get it in Seattle? Or couldn't he pay for your fish? And what's he worried about? You said he was well fixed. Then why's he trying to sell Chickwan before he gives it a good try?"

"You're smarter'n I thought," she said.

"You loaning Ash money?"

"I'm through with packing fish."

She meant it as a complete answer but he couldn't understand why she'd told him so much.

"Watch Ash's tally on your fish," he said as he stood up.

Don went back to the cannery. He didn't want to remain in Nevada's presence. She saw too much, knew too much.

Marty Boyle was in the office, and suddenly Don found himself talking.

"You musta thought I was nuts at Chickwan the other night," Don said. "Maybe I was, turning those fish loose."

"You're making a parlay," Marty said. "Man can't lose his nerve. He's got to figure it through and then let it ride. Only kick in a parlay is in the last bet."

Don looked at the strange little man, sitting with his eyes closed. Or were they closed? And Marty, who knew nothing of fish, understood what was driving Don.

"I've played horses that hadn't shown much," Marty said, "but I'd been watching the strain for years. Followed every colt. Breeders fool around, trying this and that, but sometimes one'll figure years ahead. Get an idea and stick to it no matter what happens. Some day he can't miss. I'm a sucker for what he turns out, even if it's got only three legs."

Don couldn't speak for a moment. Marty understood about Chickwan. And he had been seeing Nevada every day. They liked each other, and Nevada would try to pump him. She'd even try to swing him, but she hadn't been able to.

"Thanks, Marty," Don said humbly. "You may still lose but you'll get a run for your money. What we did the other night —Ash offered Chickwan to Nevada for ten thousand. I could get it for that, or less."

"You've paid for your ticket," Marty said.

He went out, but he came back. "Don't get Nevada wrong," he said. "She plays hard but she plays square. I'm going to drink some beer with her. She's the only one in town who understands what I'm saying."

That evening the *Skookum* came in with a fair catch.

"I corked two of Ash's traps," Lloyd Geary said. "I hear he hasn't put up two thousand cases."

"And he thinks Chickwan's no good," Don said. "Offered it to Nevada for ten thousand. But some day his tender'll find thirty thousand humpies in the spillers."

"That'd be just too bad. Any time you want to run down there again, I'm willing."

DON was troubled as he went back to the office. He'd never been under obligations in the past. From the day he'd started trolling for springs when he was twelve he'd fought his own way. Right on up, he'd done everything for himself. Now it wasn't like that. Things were getting complicated.

First it had been Thad, then Marty, and now Lloyd. Every time Don made a move he went further in their debt. He'd never owed anything until now. He didn't like it, and Lloyd's loyalty bothered him most of all.

Next morning Sockeye Sam was in early with a deck load. The stern of his boat was barely afloat.

"Another hour and I'da had to dump a few," he said. "She's breezing up outside."

"Moulton's?" Don asked.

"I'm not collecting lead. Nevada—I'll get her yet."

"If you do, take the fish to Sukoi Bay," Don said.

He went into the cannery. Two purse seiners had brought fish the night before and again he had enough to run all day and half the night. Men in the crew and the Indian women grinned as he passed. That was another obligation. They kept piling up, even when he was winning.

Marty found Don talking to Thad.

"Nevada's taking supplies to her traps," he said. "Asked me to go along."

Don looked out a window. It was raining and southeast gusts slashed at the building.

"If she's going in her gasboat, you'll get slammed around," Don said.

"Nevada's been in gasboats since the first one," Thad said.

Half an hour later Don saw Marty and Nevada on a float. Sue was with them. The storekeeper delivered several boxes and bags and when the boat left the harbor Sue was aboard.

Don thought nothing of it. Alaskans take weather as they find it, and so much is bad they are accustomed to gales. Nearly always in Southeastern Alaska there's shelter nearby.

In the afternoon Sockeye came in again with fish.

"Surprise Passage is smoking," he said. "I'da brought more if it'd been quiet."

"Moulton's?" Don asked. "How'd you get 'em in daylight?"

"I saw his tender picking up fish from his traps, working north. So I took a run down to Chickwan. Nobody goes there, and the trap's in a cove. Same's working nights."

He grinned. Sockeye felt better now. He'd been doing well with two trips in one day. Don considered for a moment. He didn't want to pack Chickwan salmon, but these fish were dead and Sockeye would sell them to Ash.

"Get 'em into the fish house," Don said.

Sockeye turned away and then came back, still grinning.

"The old lady on the hill won't be sleeping home tonight," he said. "She won't be sleeping any, way that trap's tossin'."

"What you mean?"

"Nevada, damn her! Stuck on her Number Two trap. She and Thad's brother. They'll be like sardines with the watchman in that shack."

"Stuck!" Don shouted. "Where's her gasboat?"

"Got away from 'em. On the beach some place now. They was waving and shooting a rifle when I came by. I run in close and they told me, but when they asked me to take 'em off I yelled to Nevada just what she could do. She's got nerve, that old—"

Don struck him on the shoulder.

"Quit blabbing!" Don shouted. "Did you see Sue? Was she in the shack? Did you look for that gasboat?"

"Sue!" Sockeye said. "She wasn't with 'em."

Don ran to a bollard and threw off Sockeye's bow line.

"Get out!" he said. "Show up here again and I'll feed you to the Iron Chink."

He ran to the *Skookum,* which had finished unloading and was fast to the wharf. The crew had gone home or to The Mug Up but Lloyd was aboard.

"Lash down the seine!" Don shouted. "Pass the line from the skiff."

Lloyd didn't ask questions. He went to work. Don took the line of the fat, heavy skiff and make it fast to the wharf, ran to get the light boat in which he'd rescued the Indian in Surprise Passage. In five minutes it was on deck and the *Skookum* was heading out of the harbor. Lloyd looked at Don.

"Nevada's stranded on her Number Two trap," Don said.

"It'll be rough but she'll be all right," Lloyd said.

A gust hit the wheelhouse. Rain slashed across the windows. Don listened and he couldn't speak for a moment.

"Her gasboat went adrift," he said. "Sue's in it."

LLOYD went below. Soon Don felt the increased vibration of an engine that was running all out.

"That baby can be coaxed," Lloyd said when he returned.

"Don't let her shake loose from the bed," Don said. "And get the chart and tide book. You know these waters and the currents and I don't. Sockeye got in at four. The boat musta broke loose be-

"They was waving and shooting a rifle when I come by. I run in close, but when they asked me to take 'em off I yelled to Nevada just what she could do."

fore two, maybe earlier. Nevada left here at nine, so it might have been eleven."

"We'd better run down to the trap and find out."

"And be too late," Don said. "Maybe we're too late now."

Lloyd spent ten minutes with chart and tide tables.

"It don't look so good, Don," he said.

He'd doped it all out, a heavy flood tide in the morning and the wind with it, splits in the currents, reefs, passages, islands, rocky cliffs against which seas would crash, the probable rate of drift of a disabled gasboat.

"It's one of two places," Lloyd said. "Depends on where she was when the ebb started. If it was early, she might get carried into Shoal Pass. Later—"

"We'll try the pass first," Don said.

They reached it in an hour, and took a terrific beating in tide rips off the mouth of the channel. Once inside, the ebb was too strong for the *Skookum's* motor.

"She ain't here," Lloyd said. "Even with a heavy flood, she'd never have made that first bend. She'd be on the beach and we could see her."

They went back through the tide rips with pyramidal waves toppling onto the *Skookum's* deck, and after they were free of the rips they had the seas broadside until they had rounded Spruce Point. The

Skookum was taking about all she could stand.

When they could talk again, Lloyd spoke cheerfully.

"Unless she broke a shaft or dropped a wheel, Sue got going again," he said. "Lot o' places where she could hunt a hole. We'll find smoke coming out of the pipe and Sue snug and cozy."

He elaborated on that, told how careful Nevada was to keep the motor in good shape, how there were many bays and coves into which even a lame gasboat could crawl. He told of boats that had been considered lost, only to be found undamaged.

"Hell!" he said. "Sue was born in Alaska."

Don didn't speak. These were unfamiliar waters and he left the wheel to Lloyd. He kept the lee door open, watching the shore, hoping yet fearful.

"Take it easy," Lloyd said. "If we see anything, she's all right."

Don knew what he meant. If they didn't see anything—a gasboat hitting the beach along that coast wouldn't last longer than an egg. Struggling waves surged over rocks and high up on cliffs. They didn't see anything.

They were going north in the main channel now. It turned eastward and Lloyd went along the north shore. The motor still labored heavily. Two hours of daylight remained. Don had no hopes now. They were too far from Nevada's trap.

"There's a little inlet ahead," Lloyd said. "It's a chance." He waited a moment and then said, "The last one."

They came to the inlet. It was narrow, penetrated the land about half a mile. The water inside was a white mass, indicating rocks and reefs. Seas drove to the head and crashed onto the beach. And the inlet was empty.

They sank, rolled, rose again on a big wave, and saw nothing. Don stood in the door, staring as they rose once more. He saw the bow of a small craft climb a wave just off the beach. It lunged up, over, and he knew it was Nevada's gasboat.

"We're going in," Don said.

"No," Lloyd said. "I'll take any sort o' chance. In there we got none. Couldn't do any good. I know that hole. Full o' bricks. And the tide's running out."

CHAPTER IX

FISHERMAN'S TRAP

DON had pulled his arms loose when he was a kid, trolling for spring salmon near Ketchikan, and he'd been in plenty of tough spots. Handling a small boat was as instinctive as walking and he had a back and arms that could snap an oar if he laid into it.

But he'd never been in a spot like this. The little inlet funneled the seas until they bounced off the beaches and built pyramids. A conical wave would lift him high, then melt under him, dropping the light skiff so hard it threatened to split open. Lloyd had said Don couldn't make it, and Lloyd seemed to be right.

Don knew what had happened to Sue. By luck alone, her craft had hit the mouth of the inlet instead of the rocky beach outside. Once in, she had dropped the anchor. The anchor had caught, and then it had slipped. It had kept slipping until the gasboat was now close to the cliffs at the head.

It may not have been that simple. Don hadn't seen Sue or a signal from her, and he knew what that could mean. When she went forward in that sort of sea to drop the anchor she could easily have been knocked overboard. He thought of this as waves fought each other for a chance to kill him, as he passed a tiny arm in which, Lloyd had said, he would find a snug anchorage. Seas broke over reefs. Twice he touched rocks with an oar. When he rose on a wave he could see the *Skookum* hove to off the entrance. Lloyd had been right. The *Skookum* would have been wrecked inside.

Near the end, Don swung the skiff to head into the seas and let the wind drive him on. He faced the gasboat now and saw it pitch and roll violently. Spray swept over its tiny wheelhouse. The manila anchor cable was stiff as a steel bar and the cliffs were only a few yards astern. Still there was no sign of Sue.

Don watched his chance, stepped onto the foredeck of the gasboat when he rose on a wave. He let the skiff go. It would be of no use now.

"Sue!" he yelled when his hands hooked the grab rail.

He had no answer and made his way aft, pounding on the trunk, swinging around the wheelhouse. She must have heard if she were aboard.

"Sue!" he yelled when he reached the after deck.

She came up the companionway, staring at him without belief. He scarcely recognized her. Her hair was wet and stringy, her face covered with grease. Only the eyes told it was Sue.

Don felt his knees go weak and the salt on his face cracking in the deep crevices of a grin. Then he saw her staring in terror at the cliffs so close astern. He shoved her down the steps, followed, looked at the motor.

"I've taken most everything apart," she said, speaking rapidly. "Just got it together. Ready to give it a last try."

Coolness was needed, and she had it. Don knew they needed speed too. He made a swift preliminary inspection.

"Old open-base Monarch," he said as he tested the carburetor and the make and break spark. "How'd it stop?"

"Slowed down, then quit," she said. "Before we got to the trap. I tried everything, and when I swung the flywheel over it started again."

Don knelt beside the engine, reached into a cylinder, looked at his fingers. They were dry. He saw a can of oil, read the label.

"It wasn't blowing so hard then," Sue said. "After Nevada and Marty were on the trap I circled in the channel. It ran beautifully, then slowed and stopped. I started it twice after that but it always quit."

"Been using that oil?" he said.

"Only today. The storekeeper didn't have the brand we've been using."

"Take the wheel," Don said. "We're getting out of here."

He pushed her toward the companionway, picked up an oil can. The two-cylinder engine stood breast high and he opened the petcocks, squirted oil into them, then gasoline. He opened the four oil cups, twisted the adjustments.

Don worked swiftly. Twice he'd felt the anchor slip. He knelt on the heaving deck, rocked the big flywheel, threw it past compression. The first cylinder fired, the second. Sparks and flame shot from the petcocks and he closed them, adjusted the throttle. The engine settled to a steady, noisy clanking and he leaped up the steps.

A conical wave would lift him high, then drop the light skiff so hard it threatened to split open.

"Keep her into it," he said. "Only one anchor and cable?"

She nodded and he went forward. He wore hip boots, oilskin pants and coat, and he was soaked as waves crashed onto the bow. He signaled Sue, felt the boat move forward, hauled in line.

Gusts swung the bow and the cable nearly pulled him overside, but he could see and feel how well Sue handled wheel, clutch and throttle. In the turmoil, though the boat pitched and rolled and yawed, the hands on the controls were sure.

When the anchor came up Don carried it aft, tossed it down the companionway, dragged the cable after it, took wheel and throttle.

Gusts swung the bow and the cable nearly pulled him overside.

THEY moved forward slowly. A dozen times he thought they'd hit a rock or the gale would swing the bow against the engine's power. Soaring to a crest, he got a glimpse of Lloyd and the *Skookum* still hanging off the entrance, and in the instant while the gasboat poised before its next plunge he thought how obligations were piling up.

Sue stood in a corner of the tiny wheelhouse, trying to wedge herself against the violence of the sea's battering, and the violence was too great. Again and again

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he felt her body driven upon his. A wet strand of her hair struck his face. Once an arm was flung across his shoulder. He tried to concentrate on the waves, on the rocks, on getting out of the welter, and ahead lay the turn into the small arm, the only place where they could be safe.

The gasboat rolled so far, when at last he turned, he felt everything he had done in vain. No boat could take this. All the strength of one arm was against the spokes as he opened the throttle. Sue was wrenched loose. Her arms went around his neck and she clung desperately. They'd never roll back.

Stillness and peace struck like a blow. He hung limply over the wheel. Sue pushed him aside and closed the throttle. She held the boat against gusts that smashed down from the cliffs, let the clutch out, in, holding her place in the center of a pool. Don forced strength back into his arms and legs.

"No swinging room," he said. "Go astern. I'll drop the hook aft. Then put me on that rock and I'll get a bow line ashore."

She handled the boat beautifully and in ten minutes they were snugly moored When Don went into the wheelhouse, Sue had stoked the fire in the galley stove. He took off his oilskins and boots. Water drained from his clothes. Sue closed the hatch.

"It'll be warm soon," she said.

He sat on a bunk in the little cabin. A clock in the wheelhouse struck three bells. It was nearly dark and the gale still roared. It might last all the next day and the next night.

Sue heated water and scrubbed grease from her hands and face. She set frying pan and tea kettle on the stove.

"I haven't eaten since breakfast," she said. "And you must be hungry."

"Guess so," he said. "I hadn't thought about it."

She brought out ham, eggs, potatoes, a can of peas and one of apricots. She cut bread, took a cake from a locker, pulled a table on its slide from the bulkhead, lowered and set it. She worked swiftly and she didn't speak until after the food was on the table.

"I wanted speed more than anything else," she said, "so make allowances. I'm starved."

Don was hungry but he took time to watch her. He remembered how she looked in Ketchikan four years ago and again he was aware this was not the same girl. Then it had been youth and color and an unrestrained spirit. She'd been reckless, heedless. Don realized for the first time that he, and marriage, had been the product of an unguided vitality, of an unformed desire for something new. It may have been only a whim.

He thought of this briefly. What he saw now convinced him more than ever that here was someone else, someone with whom he must start afresh. Sue had changed but he no longer wanted the vivid child he had married. As when he had first seen her in Tamgas, he wanted the girl who now sat across the table from him.

Sue ate like a fisherman, not speaking until she had finished. She refilled the coffee cups.

"What did you do to the engine?" she asked. "Why couldn't I start it?"

"I had an open-base Monarch when I trolled off Ommaney," he said. "Got to know what they think."

"Yes, but—"

"Your oil cups were set for four or five drops a minute. Enough with good oil. That cheap stuff—your cylinders went dry and you lost compression. After the engine'd stopped for a while—if you didn't close the cups—enough oil ran in to make her start again."

"I thought I knew the old mill," she said. "I took the carburetor off, shellacked the float. Blew out the gas line, took the make and breaks apart and adjusted the points."

"I know," he said. "I got blown from Ommaney past Sitka."

"I must be dumb."

She was angry with herself, and he'd never seen this side of Sue. He wondered if Nevada's system of not teaching, of letting people learn, had worked.

"You did more'n any girl I ever heard of," he said. "I'll talk to that storekeeper. He might have killed you."

SHE took a drink of coffee and lighted a cigarette. Each movement was deliberate. Her eyes didn't see anything. Don knew what she'd gone through, drifting and rolling with the gale, not seeing a chance to

live but keeping her head and working on the engine. It was a mean, tough spot. He hadn't believed any girl could meet it. He was about to tell her this when she spoke.

"I thought I was lucky to hit the inlet," she said. "Until I got inside. But it was a lot worse when you came. I don't see how you did it in a skiff. You must have known you didn't have a chance, before you started or afterwards. I want you to see I understand all that, and how you came anyhow. If you hadn't come—" She shrugged, and looked full at him. "Now I'd be soft as a jelly fish from being banged against the rocks. All this—I'm trying to tell you."

She arose abruptly and carried out the dishes. She made a racket with them, more when she opened the stove door and stuffed the firebox with wood. She slammed up the table and smacked down a dishpan. He couldn't talk against the noise. He understood she didn't want him to talk.

When Sue had finished she sat on the bunk opposite.

"Is Nevada all right?" she said.

"I don't know," he said. "Wasn't near the trap."

"Then how did you know about me? I don't understand."

"Took a chance. Sockeye Sam said Nevada was stranded and he wouldn't take her off. I asked about you and he said you weren't on the trap."

"But how did you know where I was?"

"I didn't. Lloyd Geary figured out how you might drift. Lloyd's the sort to have around. You're sitting here now because of what he did."

"He didn't figure out I'd gone adrift."

Sue was silent for a few moments.

"And Lloyd didn't come into the inlet," she said. "I don't understand why you came, after all you've said to me, feeling the way you do about me. Maybe it was like going after that old Indian, a man you'd never seen. Maybe—"

She stopped as if studying him, and yet as if she didn't really see him, as if she was thinking about something else. He waited for her to go on.

"Maybe you just couldn't help it," she said. "Like when you went to get Thad when his wife was sick."

The clock struck six bells and she jumped up, lifted the bunk and pulled out blankets.

"I'm all in," she said. "Are your clothes dry?"

"Enough. I'll have a look around. You get some rest."

It was black dark on deck. Don couldn't see anything, even after several minutes. Rain beat on the wheelhouse. The gale, sweeping around the mountains, piled into the pit in blasts that made the boat shiver. Darkness and rain and wind could have brought uneasiness if not fear, but Don had lain in many a hole like this and he'd made sure of the moorings.

It was Sue he thought of as he stood there. She'd been through enough to crack up, and she hadn't. She had been very careful to say she was completely aware of the risks he had taken to get to her but there'd been no warmth in it. He'd feel better if there'd been hysteria. She was too cool, too controlled, like a hunk of ice broken off a glacier. It wasn't natural.

Yet he couldn't believe that. She had come right out in the open when she'd told why she'd acted as she did four years ago. She wasn't afraid to meet the truth, or tell it. As he stood there, listening to the gale, staring into the blackness, he could figure out only one answer. This was a new Sue, whether due to Nevada's system or her own strength he didn't know, but the new Sue wasn't interested in any man except Ash Moulton. And the sooner he realized that, the better.

He went below and she was lying on the post bunk, her back to him. Blankets covered her from toe to chin. He didn't know whether she had undressed. She didn't turn. She said only, "See you in the morning."

He built up the fire, took off shirt, trousers and socks and hung them to dry. He blew out the cabin lamp and lay down, pulled the blankets over him. His body was tired but he didn't go to sleep. He listened for Sue's breathing but could not hear it because of the gale. He thought, as he stared upward in the darkness, that he'd been married to this girl more than four years and this was the first time they'd slept in the same room, or even in the same building or boat. But he felt that if the tiny cabin were only half as big the situation would be the same.

DON wakened first in the morning. He pulled on his clothes, started a fire and went on deck. Big seas still rolled into the inlet and the gale beat down from the cliffs. When he heard Sue getting breakfast he went below.

"Good morning," she said. "How's it look?"

"Like another night here," he said.

"Does it?" she said anxiously, opening a locker. "Nevada and I didn't expect to be gone long. Didn't bring much."

They saw a thick slice of ham and a box of eggs, many of them broken, a half loaf of bread, remains of the cake. She looked at him aghast.

"For four meals!" she cried, and then burst out laughing. "I am dumb! We took supplies for the trap watchmen. They're in the hold aft. We can eat for weeks!"

He wanted to ask if she'd mind being shut up with him for weeks but the day had started too well. Sue's laughter was free. Her glance wasn't guarded. They'd be together all day and another night. He wanted to keep it this way. He hoped nothing would happen to spoil it.

Sue took over the galley tasks, working swiftly. Don had batched so long in boats he could appreciate her efficiency. When all was shipshape after breakfast, he started the motor and Sue ran the boat to a rock so he could go ashore and cut firewood. They opened the hatch and got provisions, planned a big lunch.

They talked only of what they were doing, finding something humorous always and laughing a great deal. Don forgot why they were there, forgot the last four years. He had never been so happy, and he felt Sue was happy too. She couldn't be acting. Her laughter was too free and her comments came too swiftly. This, he felt sure, was the girl he had found in Tamgas. Life with her could be more than he had dreamed.

But after lunch, when they had nothing more to do and rain kept them in the cabin, Don found there was little they could talk about. Several times he was about to mention something, only to discover dynamite in it. Salmon, Tamgas, Nevada, his cannery, even details of their present lives—everything would lead to the past and to Ash Moulton.

Sue tried to be gay, and the trying was evident. She too caught herself on the verge of something that would blow up in their faces, and stopped speaking. Don sat in silence, which didn't help. He resented that it had to be this way. The morning had been so perfect.

A blast shook the boat and Sue jumped up to look out a porthole at the turmoil in the inlet.

"Do you suppose someone took Nevada off?" she exclaimed. "Number Two is exposed to southeast. She lost a trap there once. If this one broke loose they wouldn't have a chance."

"Someone'll pick 'em up," Don said. "Don't you worry."

"Do you suppose Lloyd did?"

"Lloyd didn't leave until he saw us come in here. He had his own troubles in the dark last night."

She whirled around to face him. She was afraid.

"Who knows about it in Tamgas?" she demanded. "Did you tell anyone?"

"No. I got out too fast."

"Then only Sockeye knew. Sockeye! He'd like to see her drowned. Not taking her off! He ought to be hung!"

She blazed as when he'd first known her.

"When did you see Sockeye?" she cried. "Were you buying fish from that pirate?"

"Yes," he said. "Certain fish."

"Nevada's. Because she wouldn't sell to you."

"I won't take Nevada's fish. I told Sockeye so."

He wasn't backing out, but Sue did. Her glance wavered and she flushed. He knew her anxiety for Nevada had swept her into this.

"Nevada'll be all right," he said. "Yesterday, before it started to smoke, Ed Watson in the Sukoi Bay tender must have taken her off."

"Ed picked up the fish before we got there," she said.

"But Lloyd is back now. He'd tell what happened. Tamgas isn't letting Nevada stay on that trap."

She looked out the porthole again, stood there for a long time. Don didn't mind. He could get his fill of looking at her, and he'd never had that chance since he came to Tamgas. He could see only one cheek, the one with the faint scar, and the tip of her nose, which was always so quick to

lift in battle, but he was astonished how much he could learn of her.

Her hair, short enough to seek its own wild course, was wholly expressive. It flamed and rebelled against restraint, and even in the dim light it glistened with vitality. Her head was high, with the little tilt that examined life, and challenged it. That was her courage, as the shoulders showed her strength and competence.

His gaze swept down, and he forgot the spirit of her. Round breast lifting the sweater, arms that bent backward at the elbows, curve of hips that could be sensed but not described—Don felt his hands lift with desire.

She turned, but she didn't see what was in his mind. The spirit her hair expressed blazed in her eyes.

"This gasboat came in!" she cried. "It can get out. Why don't you do something? We've got to find Nevada!"

A blast careened the boat and Sue was thrown off balance, sat down. She glared at him, and he stared back. He didn't like to injure this spirit but he saw it now as something that always had and always would come between them. Bitterly he considered it.

"I thought you'd changed," he said at last.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"I was sure you had, the day you talked on Nevada's porch. You couldn't have said all that four years ago. But now, blowing off—" He shrugged. "Maybe Nevada had a good scheme about hot stoves and sharp knives. Only it didn't work."

SHE ROSE and went up to the wheelhouse, stood looking out the port window at waves rushing up the inlet. He had a sick feeling. It had been perfect here alone with Sue. He'd seen the fine side of her. He'd thought she was honest and had courage. She'd been fun too, more than he'd known, but something was very much wrong. She must hate him, had been pleasant only because he had come for her. She was probably sitting down there now thinking about Ash. She didn't seem to care whether Ash was yellow and a crook. Maybe there was something about women he didn't know the first thing about.

That's how he felt for a while, and then he remembered what she'd gone through. Death had been sitting on her shoulder for hours on end and she hadn't cracked. Maybe she had a right to crack now, and perhaps that was all she was doing. Maybe she was more worried about Nevada than he knew. Maybe—he didn't know what to think. He felt he couldn't go through life sitting on a box of dynamite.

Don had been in the wheelhouse a long while when Sue joined him. Her look was direct and the fire had gone from her eyes. She leaned against the starboard side.

"I'm sorry for blowing off," she said simply. "I hadn't any right to. This boat couldn't live five minutes outside. But Nevada—I'm worried."

"Sure," he said, not too amiably.

"I mean it. And I know what you think of me, even without all you've told about how you felt. I don't blame you. I don't even blame you for telling Ash to stay away from me. I'm sorry you have to wait until September to be free of me. But you will be. Then you needn't worry about whether I'm drowning or doing anything else."

She still looked steadily at him. She certainly had plenty of nerve, and he was confused again. This had been as direct and honest as anyone could ask for.

"We might as well clear it all up," she said. "I was a fool to marry you. Maybe worse than a fool. Not you but to marry. I thought it would be exciting. It would set Ketchikan on its ear. And when you went to get Thad, and then left for the summer, leaving me in the hospital, I hated you. Like a brat hates. That's all I was, a brat. I thought I'd got over it, though you don't think so."

She paused as if for breath but she still looked steadily at him. Her head was up. She was going through with this. Whatever she was, Don thought, she had courage.

"I did tell Ash how Nevada wouldn't back you," she said. "It was done and gone. I didn't see any harm in it."

"Ash made plenty use of it," he said. "He queered me with trap owners and fishermen."

"I didn't think of that. But I didn't tell him anything else, even though I thought you were acting from spite, were trying to wreck him."

"I was trying. I still am. And I'll do it yet."

He was angry, thinking of Ash, and her coolness vanished.

"Oh!" she cried. "You hold such terrible grudges! Against me! Against Ash! Against Nevada! If anyone crosses you—you never forget."

Her sudden vehemence rocked him. He started to speak and then wondered if he did hold grudges. He'd never thought so. Ash—that wasn't a grudge.

"I've got no grudge against you," he said. "All I wanted was to know what happened, and why. I've got no grudge against Nevada. If she thinks she can do better siding with Ash, that's her business. Ash! You won't believe me. You believe him. But I've told him more than I told you, and I told him first. I told him he's a crook and I'd make him pay."

She looked away for the first time. Her body sagged hopelessly and all the strength went from her face. She turned toward the companionway, and at that moment a gust swept down from the heights, gripped the boat and shook it. Sue staggered, was thrown violently against him.

He caught her, and when his arms were around her he forgot all that had been said, all he had thought. He held her so tightly she could not move, though she struggled for a moment, and when she stopped struggling he kissed her neck and her hair. He pushed her face up with his chin and kissed her mouth and her throat. For a long minute he was mad, heedless, unaware there was no response.

"Please!" she said at last.

Her voice was as dead as the look in her face. He released her and she turned to the steps.

"I'm going to lie down," she said. "Yesterday, last night—I can't take any more."

A little later he saw she was asleep. He sat on the other bunk, feeling hopeless, and drained. He lay down.

The clink of a lamp chimney and a striking match wakened him. The portholes were dark. He sat up quickly as the lamp lighted the cabin.

"The wind is blowing harder," Sue said.

He listened, felt a new motion.

"Switched to southwest," he said. "She'll blow out tonight."

"And we can go home tomorrow?" she asked quickly.

The eagerness and relief in her voice hurt.

"In the morning," he said.

They scarcely spoke during supper and afterward. She was not sulky. Rather a new sweetness had come. Her voice was gentle but all the light had gone from her eyes. Soon she was in bed, and he was alone.

Don waited in the wheelhouse a long while, and when he went down he stood watching her as she slept, until at last he put out the light.

HE WAKENED early to comparative stillness. After a glance out a porthole he started the engine. Three hours later they approached Tamgas harbor. Sue had been below most of the time, cooking breakfast and clearing up afterward, but before they rounded the point she came and stood beside him. He could feel her tension as she looked ashore.

"Don! Don!" she cried happily. "Nevada's home! See the smoke from her kitchen?"

As they slid in to a float Nevada waved a cloth from her veranda. Men came from boats and grinned as Sue and Don passed. The cannery whistle tooted joyfully.

"Aren't you excited?" Sue cried. "You must come up to the house. Nevada will want to see you."

"I've been away from the cannery two days," Don said. "I got to get back."

He found Thad, as always, watching every detail of the packing operation.

"Have a nice trip?" Thad asked. "After this you'd better stick around."

"What's happened? Is Marty all right?"

"Lloyd picked him and Nevada off that night. And Marty told me how Ash offered Chickwan for ten thousand dollars. You ought to've bought it."

"Has Ash been down there?"

"His tender went. Took thirty thousand humpies. Ash is telling how he'll pack more'n seventy thousand cases."

Don didn't speak. He'd intended to free more fish from Chickwan, keep Ash discouraged. Now, while he'd been pulling Sue out of the sea, Ash had discovered what a gold mine he owned.

(End of Part II)

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

CAMPING and prospecting for health and fun along the headwaters of the Missouri.

Query:—I was raised on the Milk River but left here in 1912 and returned only 3 years ago. I am slightly disabled from this late fracas and want to spend next summer in the mountains, which I know very little about. I will go into them with a saddle horse and pack horse. Would like to do a little prospecting on the side. Where is the best place to go in?

Where are the big sheep outfits?

Can a man drift south through the mountains without running into too settled country and barb-wire?

I would like to fish and hunt in season so anything you can tell me and any advice you can give will be greatly appreciated.

—W. J. O'Reilly,
Harlem, Montana

Reply by Fred W. Egelston:—That country from Glacier Park west to the Idaho line on the Great Northern is about as pretty as any you will find lying around loose for a summer's camping trip. This is especially true of the Kootenai River and its tributaries. However, if you are not accustomed to making your way around in the mountains I would strongly advise you to either take someone along who is experienced along this line, or to stay reasonably close to the beaten track.

As to prospecting, I believe the country further south, that is, in the headwaters of the Missouri River above Great Falls, would be more promising. However, there is some mighty rough country in there and there's a lot of it, mostly standing up on edge.

I came out of W. W. No. I with a dose of gas T.B., which I finally got rid of by putting in every day of the fishing season for about four years on a trout stream. However, I made my headquarters here in Elko and took short trips from a day to a couple of weeks to nearby streams. I had a car and good camp equipment, of course. I believe that such a program would be your best bet. If you can pick up a Model A with a pickup body, it will take you anywhere you have any business going, and bring you back. There is no danger of it wandering away during the night and it isn't apt to break a leg or get bitten by a rattler. And if you can find someone who likes the outdoors to go along, it will be a lot more fun. As to big sheep outfits, you will run into them most anywhere, as they use the high country for summer range.

The Sweet Grass hills, north and east of Shelby, have some gold in them but water is pretty scarce unless you are familiar with the country and know where to find it.

The following areas should be suitable:

West of Choteau, in Teton county; Lewis & Clark county, around Helena; Jefferson county, out of Boulder; the Gallatin Country, and Madison and Beaverhead counties, further south and west.

Take it easy. It is very easy to exhaust yourself in that mountain country until you get used to the altitude. And if you should get lost, *go back down stream.*

POWER tools for Down Under.

Query:—I am planning on moving to Australia to stay. Am a machinist by trade and I've quite a few electric powered tools made

to run on 110 volts A.C. Could you tell me what is the voltage of the power supply in Sydney and is it A.C. or D.C.?

Also, what is the import duty on such tools and machines, such as drill, lathe, and grinder?

Shall I bring my own car or buy one there? Do you know the import duty on a car or light pickup truck?

Also would appreciate it if you would give my name to the local Chamber of Commerce (or the equivalent) for any literature they may care to send. I am 39, single, Canadian born and a U.S. citizen.

Could you suggest anything that a newcomer should bring with him?

—V. C. Andrews,
2701 Main St., San Diego, Calif.

Reply by Alan Foley:—I am interested to note that you plan on moving to Australia, and here following are replies to the questions that you raise:

(1) The Sydney power supply runs on 240 volts A.C. Originally, some sections of the city ran on D.C., but today, except for a minute area, all is A.C.

(2) I don't know whether the electric power tools that you possess will run on 240 volt A.C., but the import duty on those which you mention is as follows:

Lathes: 15% plus 4% plus 10%
Drills: 5% plus 10% plus 10%
Power Bench Grinder: 15% plus 4% plus 10%
Milling Machines: 15% plus 4% plus 10%
Power Press: 65% plus 10% plus 10%
Spanners: vary according to type from 15% plus 4% plus 10% to 55% plus 10% plus 10%

The above duties are based upon the second-hand value of the machines, but this value is assessed by customs officers here, to whom you have to supply the price of each machine when new, and your personal assessment of the second-hand value of each.

In regard to the advisability of bringing your own car or truck, I am advised that this is not usually desirable. I cannot tell you what the duty would be because the system of assessment is too involved. As I understand it, the chassis is first subject to a tax of something like 400 dollars, and that individual parts additional to the chassis are then individually taxable, with the result that the total can run out at an extremely high figure. If I could give you a definite figure as to what the all-over tax would be, it would be possible to work out whether it would pay you to bring your car out here, but without submitting its components to a customs officer (which is virtually impossible) I cannot say what the all-over tax would be. The best advice that I can offer, therefore, is to suggest that you leave your car or truck behind you.

Under separate cover I am sending you a few Sydney papers as requested. Shortly, also, I hope to send you an interesting booklet produced by the Department of Information.

MINK in the mountains.

Query:—Have been wondering if there are any areas south of San Francisco in California where there is good climate for mink or fox. I suppose only the mountainous areas would be suitable.

How does the quality of fur taken from these areas compare with the quality of fur taken from other areas of the world?

—Douglas J. Powers
Redondo, Washington

Reply by Raymond S. Spears:—There are many fur farms, south of San Francisco, including mink and fox. In some of them, which are in warm lowlands, the fur in a few generations deteriorates in weight, density. This is partly remedied by establishing the farm at a high altitude—say 3500 feet up, in the mountains.

The animals should not be too much exposed to the sunshine, which fades the furs that should be dark.

The problem of feeding fur stock profitably should be considered in establishing a fur farm. Poisoning off the wildlife in wilderness areas has deprived vast regions of natural fur farm and wild fur food supplies—under pretense of protecting domestic stock which cannot be profitably raised in much or most of the areas poisoned off.

You will do well to consult Wild Life Service, Washington, D. C. regarding fur farming. They have fur-farm reports about fox and mink, discussing various problems.

You need for raising prime fur a period of colder than freezing weather—with good nests for comfortable sleeping. Northern California and Oregon have been good fur countries.

Be sure of plenty of water, ample space for exercise, cleanliness, good air—ample spread of food in best quality. I doubt if arid regions are good for fur raising. There are a good many books and pamphlets on fur farming which cover various regions, conditions, species.

In the region you indicate, everything would depend on the local conditions. Altitude—should have six weeks or so frost. Protection from the sun, heat of midday, (moderate summer conditions); you'd want to consider the possibility of forest (chaparral) other fires. As said, ample water supply.

Fur farming, like raising chickens, cows, domestic stock, depends on one's own adaptibility to the occupation.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

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SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, 8225 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 8, Wis.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINNEY, Chatham, New Jersey.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, care of *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *Birds, their habits, and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling:—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESEBERG, care of *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—COL. R. G. EMERY, U.S.A., Ret., care of *Adventure*.

United States Marine Corps—MAJ. ROBERT H. RANKIN, U.S.M.C.R., care of *Adventure*.

United States Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, U.S.N., Ret., Box 74, Del Mar, Calif.

Military Aviation—O. B. MYERS, care of *Adventure*.

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGES SURDEZ, care of *Adventure*.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure*.

★**New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley, N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACCREAGH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*— MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange ree State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDEL, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

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Central America—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure*.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure*.

★**West Indies**—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

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Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **3** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke, Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping* — A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wembly Rd. (Forest Hill), Toronto, Ont., Canada. **5** ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

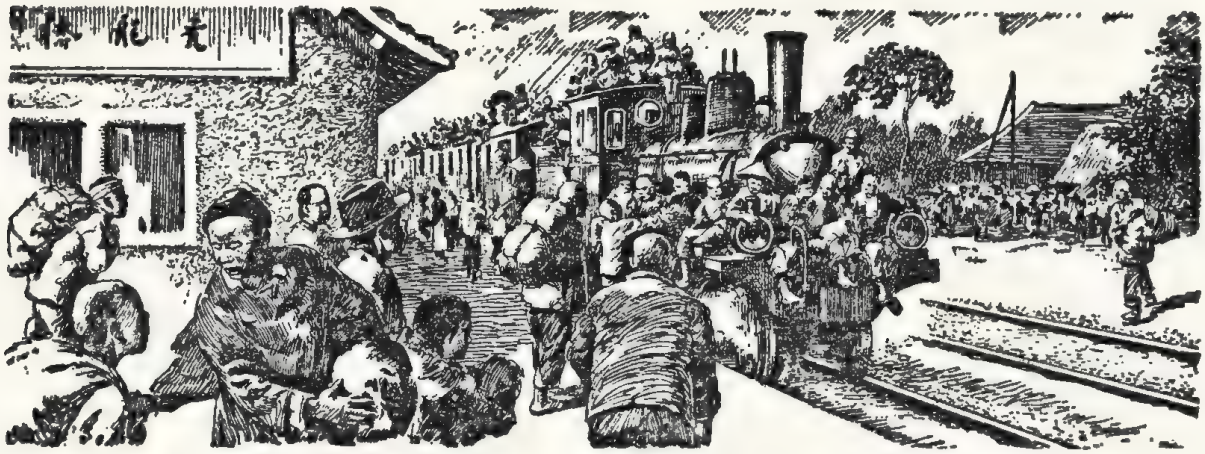
Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 720 W. New York Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, care of *Arizona Stockman*, Arizona Title Bldg., Phoenix, Ariz. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 716, Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

THE TRAIL AHEAD



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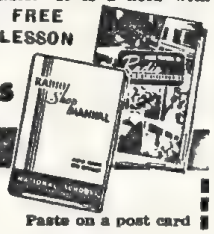

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

W. G. Carter, General Delivery, Tucson, Arizona wishes to locate Charles F. Head, about 59 years old, born in North Bay, Ontario, Canada. Would also like to find Ellsworth Head, adopted by Willis family at an early age. Charles and Ellsworth had another brother, Tom, and a sister, Leah. Would much appreciate any information concerning these people.

Paul "Duke" Byrnes, 934½ Forsythe St., Toledo, Ohio would like to locate his old buddy, James "Sugar" Solyer with whom he worked in Nevada in '39. We worked together for five years with the Div. of Interior and his hometown was Germantown, Ohio. His last known whereabouts was on the *USS Sands*, in New York Harbor in 1940. Anyone knowing his present locality, please write to Paul "Duke" Byrnes.

I would like to locate a friend of mine whose name is Joseph T. O'Hare. He was a seaman first class in the Navy. When last heard from in 1945 he was aboard the *USS Schroeder* in the South Pacific. Please write Francis R. De Capot, 65 Amherst Street, Nashua, New Hampshire.

I am trying to find my uncle, August Timm, who lives somewhere in Canada. His last known address was Loon Lake or Loon River, Sask., Canada. We have not heard from him for some time. I wrote him a letter last September and it was returned with the statement that he had moved away years ago. He is over sixty years old. I am worried about him, and would be very glad if you can help us to locate him. Please write Alexander Fink, 2004 Larry Street, Phila. 42, Pa.

Would greatly appreciate learning of the whereabouts of Harry (Gus) Stewart, Richard Donato and Sgt. Zimmer all at No. 2 Hospital, Det. Med. Dept., Fort Bragg, N. C. Stewart was from Philadelphia, Donato from New York and Zimmer from somewhere in the Middle West. All served in EENT, in 1942 and 1943. Dr. James O. Baxter, Jr., 1500 Front St., Beaufort, N. C.

W. H. McCarty, 965 Clinton St., Napa, California wants information of his two brothers, A. W. McCarty, whose nickname is "Buck" and W. F. McCarty, sometimes called "Bill."

I would appreciate any information as to the whereabouts of Joseph R. Connolly, formerly of Westfield, N. J., who has lived in and around Los Angeles since the summer of 1938. He was drafted into the U. S. Army in the early part of World War II. He was in the Air Corps at Hamilton Field, California, and at Hammond Field, California. After being discharged he resided for a time in Los Angeles and later became a civilian employee at a U. S. Naval Construction Unit at Inyokern, California. His father died and I would like to get in touch with him. Please write to J. R. Cummings, 329a Arlington Avenue, Jersey City, N. J.

Have any of you ETO men seen Lt. John Donnell Stroud (Johnny, John D. or Donn) formerly pilot in 556th Sqdn., 387th Bomb. Group, 9th Air Force. About 23 years old now, 6' 1", weight 140 lbs. Thin brown hair, brown eyes. He may be blind and badly burned; was shot down 6 miles southwest of Amberg, Germany, on April 9, 1945. Lt. Gerald Swift (Jerry or Swifty) may be with him, anywhere in Europe. Please write to his parents. C. B. Stroud, R. 1, Box 354, Coral Ridge, Ky.

Any person who was at Lamberts Point Degaussing Station, E.Y.P.S., N.O.B., Norfolk, Virginia during the period from June 1944 to July 1945 for any length of time, please communicate with Edward A. Steacy, (E.M. 3/c) 10 Hopson St., Utica, N. Y.

I would like to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of Bill Thomas, ex-marine. He is believed to be from Pennsylvania. He served overseas and was stationed at Unit "D" in Norfolk, Virginia, until July, 1945, then at Camp Lejune, North Carolina, until September, 1945. Please get in touch with Mr. E. C. Becraft, 4512 Philpotts Road, Norfolk 2, Virginia.

I wish to thank you for helping me contact Bill Thomas. It was greatly appreciated. E. C. Becraft, 4512 Philpotts Rd., Norfolk, Va.

Roy H. Edman, General Delivery, Riverside, California, would like to locate the following people: H. Goodwin, his son, Reece Goodwin, or his daughters, Rebecca, Lucinda, Minnie and Naomi Goodwin, or Ruth Doyle, last heard of in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1921.

I wish to extend sincere thanks to you for your assistance in locating my wife's father, brother and sisters. She hadn't had word of her family for thirty years and was overjoyed when they read her plea in the Lost Trails Department and wrote to her. At the time I wrote to you, we were living in Riverside, California. Again, thanks for helping us find my wife's father, Hoot Goodwin, her brother, Reece, and her four sisters, Minnie, Ruth, Naomi and Lucinda. Roy H. Edman, Vina, California.

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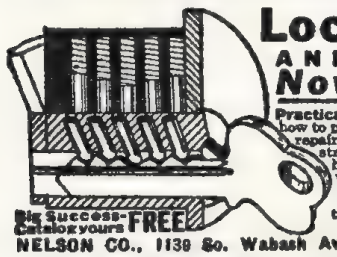

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MAGAZINE, 250 Sportsman's Bldg., Boston, Mass.

(Continued from page 10)

AND speaking of books—

Every so often we like to take time out to post you on what our authors are up to in that field. Much of the material which appears in *Adventure* naturally finds its way into book form of one sort or another and we feel you may be interested in knowing about it.

For instance—

"Land of the Dacotahs" by Bruce Nelson (University of Minnesota Press, 353 pgs., $3.75) contains as separate chapters two articles which appeared in these pages—"Badlands Emperor" and "The Myth of Calamity Jane" respectively. The volume is a dramatic history of the Upper Missouri Valley from the days of the early French explorers to the present day and full of the kind of exciting as well as authentic and informative reading any *Adventure* fan would eat up. . . . And "The Valley of Oil" by Harry Botsford (Hastings House, 278 pgs., $3.00) an exciting account of the early Pennsylvania oil fields, contains in the chapter "Transportation Tribulations" material the author incorporated in his article in *Adventure* on the Teamsters' War with the pipeline men in "Pipeline Deadline." . . . George Surdez' "Homeland" (Doubleday, 471 pgs. $2.75) is, we are happy to report, as hilariously funny a novel as we've laughed over in many a moon. Georges has drawn on the rich memories of his boyhood in Switzerland—long before Foreign Legion associations—to give us a new and completely delightful phase of his writing genius. You'll be sorry if you don't get acquainted with this Surdez you've never met before! . . . "Thunder Gods Gold" by Barry Storm (Southwest Publishing Co., 166 pgs., $2.75) contains as a separate chapter the article "Signs of Treasure" which we published a while ago in these pages. The book is enough to make any prospective treasure hunter's mouth water, giving as it does a fabulously complete account of America's most famous lost gold mines—and the best way to go about finding them.

The books noted above are only a few of those recently published which might be of particular interest to *Adventure* readers. We'll mention a few more next month, space permitting.—K.S.W.

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sank home. "Ah, yes." He coughed. "I finally figured it myself. Got to maintain my reputation. Thanks for reminding me, mister. How's the ship?"

"Very fine, sir," soothed the mate. "I'll take care of things." He crossed to the groaning Third and poked his ribs. "Stop bellyaching," he ordered, "and take over. I've got to go below."

He started for the companion and Captain Wattles's happy voice came after him: "Tell Mosely I'll take dinner at the Savoy Plaza. It's more expensive than the Travatore. And tell him to bring a hundred bucks along!" Captain Wattles snorted. "No, never mind! I'll tell him myself," and he went across to the blinker key to make the message more personal.

The mate shrugged and went down to the main deck. Timkins the pantryman was apparently waiting for him. "I hear he's figured it, sir," he said awed. "Just at the last minute."

The mate felt a little dazed. News seemed to travel by wind spirals on the *Hyacinth*. Maybe one of the crew had been keeping watch from aloft with a pair of glasses. Nothing really would have surprised the mate. "That's correct," he admitted shortly. "The Old Man's figured it. Now pass the word along we want to get to port fast, and no more monkey business!"

"Yes, sir," Timkins agreed. "And what d'you think about it all, sir? Some very nice pickings, eh?"

"Very nice," said the mate dryly. "I think I've been using the wrong method for getting a command. Personally I'm taking up cutting out paper dolls!" He ducked round the corner of the saloon house and looked in his notebook. "Well, I'm four hundred bucks to the good," he muttered, pleased. "What a trip! You don't haul ships off any more. You wash 'em off. I'm learning!" And he went on aft to attend to his kedge anchor and watched the *Sanshan* steam away, the very smoke from her stack curling back in brusque indignation. The trouble with Mosely, the mate felt, was he had no patience. His blinker was replying to Captain Wattle's final bland remarks with a single word: *NUTS.*

THE END

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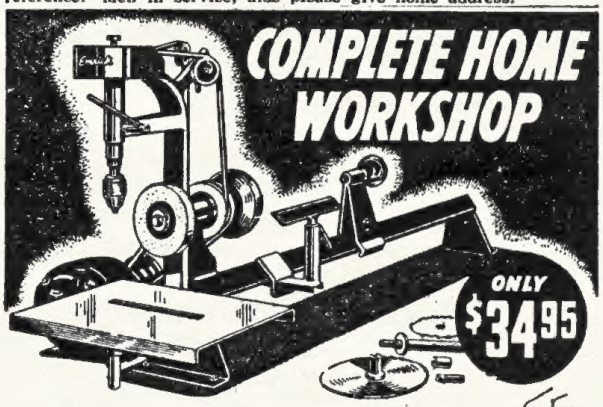

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(Continued from page 99)

wild thought crossed my mind that surely he would drive that knife-edged arrow straight through me. I yelled. McQuade never budged.

The pig bored in on me more furious than ever. One bloody tusk moved down, came ripping up. I felt the searing pain of it slashing into my face, tearing my flesh. Then there was a *whoosh* and a dull thudding impact. The pig grunted as if every bit of life and breath had left him in one second. His legs doubled and he dropped upon my chest, a tusk pointed tight against my throat.

For a second or two there was absolute silence. Then I heard McQuade yell, "Tom!"

It took me a few minutes to realize I was still alive, let me tell you. But McQuade got me straightened around, and prepared to get me on my horse and back out where a sawbones could go to work on me.

So that's how come I limp today, and the reason for this scarred face of mine. But that isn't quite all of the story. I looked at that pig, and there was the arrow —it had entered him high on the rump, traveled straight along his spinal column, buried its head in his skull. That devil, you might say, had an arrow straight through him, endways.

I said, "Jimmy, don't you realize you might easily have killed me instead of the pig?"

He grinned. "Well," he said, "if I didn't kill you, the pig would have, so I had to take a chance. But let me remind you, Tom, if I'd have had your high-velocity rifle, I *would* have killed both you and the pig. The bullet would have gone right on into your head." He paused a moment. "Those darned modern weapons are too dangerous, Tom. I knew if I hit the pig endways, he'd be the only one to die. So maybe you might say my bow saved your life—eh?" Then he added, "And another thing, a bow never jams!"

Well sir, somehow I got interested in archery after that. Sort of had a lot more respect for the old Indian slingshot—and for those blasted little wild pigs, too. Tomorrow, maybe, if we're lucky, I'll show you what that bow of mine will do.

THE END

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